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Richard Osborne  
Colonial Film Essays

The homepage for the essays is located at: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/>. The web address for each essay is included in the individual entries.

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FILM TITLE:

**2ND BATTALION 4TH BOMBAY GRENADIERS IN INDIA, CA 1930**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3210>

[AMATEUR FILM BY CAPTAIN RONALD REED] [Alternative]

PRODUCTION DATE:

1930 ca

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

SHORT SUMMARY:

Amateur film without titles shot by Captain Ronald Reed of 2nd Battalion 4th Bombay Grenadiers (King Edward's Own) of Indian Army records military and off-duty scenes of an Indian Army regiment at the start of Gandhi's campaign of civil disobedience.

FULL SUMMARY:

Reel 1: "Shall Mills, TPT and Camp". Camel and mule transport. Ambulance truck. Two British officers in solar topees.

Reel 2: "Shall Mills and Tennis, Pishin" (ie Baluchistan). Camel transport. ASD (DSA) on mountainside. Playing tennis. [Film transferred reversed]

Reel 3: "Guard mounting Shelabagh and RAF leaving Hindubagh" (ie Baluchistan). Turbaned troops (Rajputana?) mounting guard in arid mountainous area. Playing golf. Bristol Fighter F.2Bs land and take off in arid area. Volley ball.

Reel 4: "PTF Nco PT" Indian troops do PT.

Reel 5: "Sholapur" Indian wedding procession, with bride on horse and musicians. Indians play quoits.

Reel 6: "Dewar Villagers and Mali, Ajmeer" [Ajmer.] Soldiers practise Aid to the Civil Power in exercise where they confront villagers bearing (Congress Party) flags on open road, and wrest from them this symbol of defiance against continued British rule in India. Captain Reed's houseboy, Mali, repairs roof.

Reel 7: "Kgrims 3/6/33 and Bundi" British officer takes salute at parade by Indian troops. Two British officers outside house. Tracking shot through Indian town.

## NOTES:

Summary: Titles are as transcribed from original 9.5mm cassettes before films were extracted and compiled onto larger reel for screening.

Summary: re "Reel 6": Captain Reed's detailed letter narrating his activities controlling Congress demonstrations in Sholapur in May 1930 (following arrest of Gandhi) is held by IWM Department of Documents. It is unclear whether this film is a training exercise or actual small-scale encounter between villagers and troops or police.

Technical: original 9.5mm transferred at IWM onto Hi-8 tape for access, May 1997.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Reed, Ronald R (Captain): cameraman

## ACCESS CONDITIONS:

NON-IWM

## FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/9.5/A

## NUMBER OF REELS:

1

## LENGTH:

400 ft (ca)

## RUNNING TIME:

15 mins (at 16 fps) (ca)

## BLACK &amp; WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

## SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

## LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

None

## LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

None

## LANGUAGE OF SUBTTLES:

None

**Context**

This amateur film was shot by Captain Ronald Reed, who served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 4<sup>th</sup> Bombay Grenadiers (King Edward's Own). During early 1930 his battalion was stationed in Ajmer, in the province of Ajmer-Merwara (now part of Rajasthan state). On 8 May 1930 Captain Reed's company was transferred to Sholapur, where civil disobedience protests were underway (Reed, 8 July 1962).

The campaign of civil disobedience in India lasted from early 1930 to early 1934. It was prompted by the failure of the British government to acknowledge the proposal of the Nehru Report, backed by the Indian National Congress (INC), which had demanded Dominion status for India by the close of 1929. Led by Mahatma Gandhi, the campaign was launched with his famous march to Dandhi, where he protested against government taxes with the gesture of illegally making salt by boiling seawater. Following Gandhi's arrest on 5 May 1930 there were widespread protests throughout India.

In Sholapur the mill workers came out on strike, and during angry demonstrations held on 8 May, police shot and killed protestors (*The Times*, 9 May 1930). This led to reprisals, in which police stations were attacked and two Muslim policemen were killed, with initial reports stating that they had been cremated by protesters (*The Times*, 9 May 1930 and 12 May 1930). Following the evacuation of Europeans from Sholapur, the police were withdrawn from the city (Reed, 8 July 1962). The Congress leaders raised the national flag above the municipal building, and from 9-11 May 1930 the district was declared independent of British rule ('Historical Importance').

In a letter held at the Imperial War Museum, Captain Reed recalls his experiences at Sholapur (Reed, 8 July 1962). After arriving in the district his company joined with the police force and headed out in buses on reconnaissance missions. They had been instructed to disperse any gathering of four or more people, but found that crowds were easily able to scatter into lanes that were too narrow for the buses, and then reassemble once the vehicles had passed by. On 10 May, he reports of seeing police stations on fire, and recounts removing a Congress flag that he found flying above one of them. On the same day, he assessed the situation as follows:

The unarmed police could not go into the city without armed police or troops to protect them. The armed police discipline was such that they would probably have avenged the murder of policemen by uncontrolled firing. Military bus patrols were practically useless + military picquets [pickets] could only have made their presence felt in a very small area. I pointed out that the troops could do nothing if the magistrate refused to allow them to fire. I

was asked how many troops I thought would be required to occupy posts + patrol the city, + my answer was 'One Bn [battalion]'.

11 May witnessed further fruitless patrols. Reed states that INC lookouts warned people in advance to take down their Congress flags when they saw troops approaching. On 12 May he reports of the INC having assumed control of the city; they had been selecting their own officials and police force. In response, 'The civil authorities would not send the police into the city, + this I understand, forced the declaration of Martial Law'. Martial law was backed up by the arrival of a battalion of troops. On 13 May the military began to establish control in the city, and by 15 May the mills were working again. There was swift retribution for those involved in the protests. Reed writes of over 315 immediate arrests and of the whipping of those held. The three men accused of murdering the policemen were later hanged ('Historical Importance').

### **Analysis**

The sequence of greatest historical interest in Captain Reed's film features the capture of three Congress protesters in a country road. They walk in step, bearing Congress flags, towards an awaiting group of British military personnel and Indian policemen. When they reach them the leading military officer attempts to wrestle the flags off them, and he is later joined in this task by another officer. Meanwhile, the leading Indian policeman beats one of the Congress protesters with a stick, and is later joined by half a dozen Indian policemen, also raising their sticks.

There is something odd about the footage, however. Although it is filmed from the position that we would expect Captain Reed (or an assistant) to occupy, i.e. from amongst the policemen and troops, it appears to be staged. In light of the comments made by Reed in his letter, the actions of the protesters appear overly formal and too overt, and their number is surprisingly small. In addition, the way that they are set upon is not entirely convincing. Reed writes of his trepidation during these manoeuvres, but the action that takes place here is orderly and shows the police and military in absolute control. Most telling is the fact that, not only does this footage look staged, it is also re-staged. Shot from a slightly different angle, the whole process is repeated, with the film cutting just before the officers rid the protesters of their flags. Unfortunately, there is no documentation explaining this sequence. The Imperial War Museum have noted that 'It is unclear whether this film is a training exercise or actual small-scale encounter between villagers and troops or police'. The fact that this action was filmed adds further confusion: is this the documentation, or perhaps the enforced re-enactment, of a genuine protest? Does it represent the way the military wished their



actions to be perceived? Or did it serve as a training film? One outcome that remains the same no matter what prompted the film, is that the British-backed authorities had no qualms about meeting 'non-violence' with violence.

The surrounding material sheds no further light on these matters, but it does provide a complement to this moment of conflict. Reed has also captured routine military activity. Here there is a split between shots showing small groups of British officers, who can be seen at ease and smiling for the camera, and the footage of Indian troops, who are instead usually witnessed en masse. They are seen at inspection, performing exercises, and carrying out their daily duties. In neither instance is there any sense of this activity being orchestrated for the camera in the manner of the civil disobedience section. There is also footage of the military's off-duty sporting activities. Both Europeans and Indians can be seen playing games that have been imported to the sub-continent: tennis, golf, volley ball and quoits. Reed also reveals something of his home life: there is a long scene in which he focuses upon the dexterity of his houseboy, Mali, as he repairs a roof. Finally, there are several scenes that illustrate Reed's interest in Indian life. This collection of films begins with a sequence in which he focuses upon camels, and it concludes with a dynamic, but blurred sequence where he attempts to capture everything that passes by him as he films from a vehicle that is passing through a town. In between there is footage of some Dewar villagers. Here he pans across them making an ethnographical record of their expressions. There are also some shots of a wedding procession, in which he attempts to convey the full spectacle, focussing first on the brass band and then on the resplendent bride who rides a white horse. This ceremony was filmed in the district of Sholapur, and as such provides the strongest contrast, in both substance and sentiment, to Reed's battles with the protesters.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

### **Works cited**

'Atrocities at Sholapur', *The Times* (12 May 1930), 16.

'Historical Importance', <http://solapur.gov.in/htmldocs/history.pdf>

'New Rioting in India', *The Times* (9 May 1930), 16.

Reed, R., Letter, 8 July 1962 (this correspondence contains a copy of a letter that Reed left undated, but which has been identified as being written in May 1930).

MGH 4635

FILM NUMBER

FILM TITLE:

**2ND BATTALION WELCH REGIMENT IN INDIA CELEBRATE GHELUVELT DAY,  
1933**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3216>

[T A LINK AMATEUR ARMY FILM] [Alternative]

PRODUCTION DATE:

1933

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

SHORT SUMMARY:

Amateur film without titles shot by Bandsman Mr T. A. Link of 2nd Battalion Welch Regiment records soldiers of the Battalion dressed up in a variety of mock oriental guises and as Welsh miners parading, playing a rugby match and cycling on traditional Gheluveldt Day of festivities, while Battalion was stationed at Abbottabad (1931-1934).

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Link, T A: cameraman

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/16/A

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

97 ft

RUNNING TIME:

5 mins (16 fps)

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

None

## LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

None

## LANGUAGE OF SUBTITLES:

None

**Context**

Formed in 1881, the Welch Regiment was the county regiment of Carmarthenshire, Glamorganshire and Pembrokeshire. During the first Battle of Ypres in World War One, the Regiment was involved in combat around Gheluvelt, West Flanders, Belgium. Here the British Army was outnumbered by German troops and a German advance threatened to cause a breach in the Allied line (Jacob). The fighting was at its most intense on 31 October, when British troops managed to capture the village despite a concerted German attack. Although German troops eventually recaptured Gheluvelt on this day, the momentum of their advance had been broken ('Gheluvelt'). The battle was of great significance: had the Germans been successful the British Army could have found itself facing a Dunkirk-style evacuation ('Gheluvelt Park').

The most noted actions in the battle for Gheluvelt are the stand of the South Wales Borderers and the advance of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Worcestershire Regiment. The significance of the battle for these regiments has been memorialised in the Gheluvelt Day celebrations of the South Wales Borderers, held on 31 October each year, and in the construction of the commemorative Gheluvelt Park in Worcester, opened in 1922. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Welch Regiment was among those to suffer heavily in the battle. At about 10 a.m. the Welch Regiment's Colonel Morland informed Colonel Leach of the South Wales Borderers that his troops had been nearly wiped out by shellfire; later the Battalion was overwhelmed by German troops (Atkinson, 1931, 46). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Welch Regiment also chose to commemorate Gheluvelt Day each year.

Following the War the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Welch Regiment received regular postings throughout the British Empire, including Malta, India, South Africa, Hong Kong, Singapore and India ('The Royal Regiment of Wales'). Between 1 March 1931 and 11 December 1934 they were posted to Roberts Barracks, Rawalpindi, India. Although troops stationed near the North-West Frontier faced agitation from Afghan tribesmen in this period, the Battalion's stay appears to have been a quiet one. Lomax and DeCourcy's history of the regiment recalls extensive training with the 1<sup>st</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade and a Flag March through the Mansehra and Oghi Districts, which was met with 'much friendliness

from the inhabitants' (Lomax and DeCourcy, 1952, 29). There also appears to have been a great deal of rugby played, with the Battalion winning the All-India Rugby Cup in 1931 and 1933.

Much of the Battalion's training took place around nearby Abbottabad, which housed the headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade as well as three Infantry Battalions of the Gurkha Rifles. It was here that T. A. Link, a member of the Battalion's band, shot this amateur footage of the Gheluvelt festivities on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1933.

### **Analysis**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Welch Regiment's commemoration of Gheluvelt Day is peculiar and could be considered offensive to the Asian troops who were present at Abbottabad and who can be seen viewing the festivities. The Battalion's festivities are centred upon the troops adopting fancy dress and an indulging in a mock game of rugby and a frantic cycling race.

The Regiment's choice of costume and their actions mock their host country. The film begins with a parade that mimics the procession of an Indian Prince. Several of the troops are dressed up in flamboyant oriental costume, and one of them is carried on a military stretcher in parody of the Indian palanquin. This, it transpires, is the 'Prince'. He is later seen proclaiming the beginning of the festivities, reading from a large scroll inscribed with fake oriental script. After doing so he inspects the troops, who are lined up in deliberately scruffy formation. In the following scene he is shown enjoying a drink of beer. Accompanying him here is another soldier dressed in 'oriental' guise, including a false beard, which he lifts to consume his drink; the Prince later wipes his mouth on this beard. Other costumed characters in the parade appear to be still more offensive. Several members of the band have been painted with the blackface and white lips of minstrel entertainers. However, the blackface here was meant to imply the darkened faces of Welsh coalminers. Elsewhere the costumes appear to have less specific references: for example, the soldiers lined up for inspection wear protuberant white masks. The self-mimicry and absurdity of the festivities does something to temper the Indian caricature that is on display, although it would presumably be hard for the Nepalese onlookers to unpick both the meanings and non-meanings of the various guises that the troops assume.

While the racial stereotypes in T.A.. Link's film now provide uncomfortable viewing, elsewhere the troops' humour has aged better. The rugby match, for example, is undertaken and filmed with a honed awareness of slapstick comedy. It is possibly meant to be taking place between those dressed

as Indians and those dressed as miners, however all rules are abandoned as the players charge in all directions, some bearing umbrellas aloft. One player, dressed in pyjamas, feigns injury, and is tickled back to health on the touchline. What all this has to do with the events in Gheluvelt is hard to discern, although absurdity could perhaps be considered one of the more valid responses to the horrors of the Great War.

**Richard Osborne (June 2010)**

### **Works cited**

Atkinson, Christopher Thomas, *The History of the South Wales Borderers, 1914-1918* (London: The Medici Society, 1931).

‘Gheluvelt’, <http://www.ww1battlefields.co.uk/flanders/gheluvelt.html>.

‘Gheluvelt Park’,

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/herefordandworcester/low/people\\_and\\_places/history/newsid\\_8404000/8404038.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/herefordandworcester/low/people_and_places/history/newsid_8404000/8404038.stm).

Jacob, Field Marshal Sir Claud, ‘Battle of Gheluvelt’,

<http://www.wfrmuseum.org.uk/Gheluvelt.htm>.

Lomax, Cyril Ernest Napier, and John De Courcy, *The History of the Welch Regiment, 1919-1951* (Cardiff: Western Mail & Echo, 1952).

‘The Royal Regiment of Wales’, [http://www.rrw.org.uk/museums/cardiff/fact\\_sheets/4.htm](http://www.rrw.org.uk/museums/cardiff/fact_sheets/4.htm).

FILM TITLE:

**A DAY IN CEYLON**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3251>

[AMATEUR FILM BY ROY LISTER] [Alternative]

PRODUCTION DATE:

1943 ca

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

SHORT SUMMARY:

Amateur film shot by British Army Kinema Unit operator Sergeant Roy Lister records scenes of local life in Colombo, Gordon Gardens, fire fighters tackling an oil conflagration in the docks (either Colombo or Trincomalee, and caused by a spark from an engine crossing the bridge), the exteriors of two cinemas (Elfinstone Picture Palace showing "Ambika Pathi", New Olympic Theatre showing "Fantasia"), scenes in Kandy including the Temple of the Tooth and associated elephant ceremony, concluding with tropical sunset.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Lister, R E (Sergeant): cameraman

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

NON-IWM

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

Std 8mm

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

170 ft ca

RUNNING TIME:

14 mins (at 16 fps)

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

Colour

SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

None

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English  
 LANGUAGE OF SUBTTILES:  
 English

*Context*

*A Day in Ceylon* is an 8mm colour amateur film shot during the World War II by Sergeant Roy Lister of the Army Kinema Unit, a team that was responsible for screening entertainment and instructional films to soldiers.

Following the victories by Japan in south-east Asia in early 1942, Ceylon had an important part to play in the War. Providing a vantage point to both coasts of India, Churchill considered the island as a 'key point we have to hold' (Jackson, 2006, 307). The island became an armed camp and its strategic importance led to the civilian government being subordinated to military command. Sir Geoffrey Layton served as Commander-in-Chief, Ceylon. The civilian government, led by the governor Sir Andrew Caldecot, was supportive during the War, and directed the island's resources and manpower towards the campaign. Following the fall of Malaya, Ceylon provided 60% of the Allies' natural rubber supplies (Louis, 2001, 34). Ceylonese military recruits rose from 3,500 in 1939 to 26,000 in 1945, and by this point 83,000 civilians were being employed on Allied bases (Jackson, 2006, 316; de Silva, 1987, 215).

The threat to Ceylon was made manifest on 5 April 1942, when Japanese bombers and fighters reached the island, concentrating their attack on Colombo Harbour. Owing to a timely dispersal of the British fleet, losses to shipping were light. In the harbour, two boats were sunk and one merchant ship was engulfed in fire, but this was quickly extinguished (Kirby, 1958, 119).

After April 1942, the Japanese threat did not re-materialise, and Ceylon instead assumed a role as the 'behind-enemy-lines capital of the east' (Jackson, 2006, 313). The island was the home base for the Eastern Fleet, several RAF squadrons, and a garrison force, and was in addition a stop-off point for soldiers involved in the Burmese campaign. From April 1944 it was also home to South East Asia Command, the body in overall charge of Allied operations in south-east Asia.

The large Allied military presence in Ceylon had social and economic effects. Rodney Ferdinands recalls that the previously quiet town of Kandy was transformed: 'If the British troops woke up Kandy, the Americans took it by the throat and shook it' (Jackson, 2006, 320). There was almost full

employment on the island, as well as a huge demand for local products (Jackson, 2006, 312, 321). There was also rapid inflation, which was not matched by an increase in wages or salaries for the local population (de Silva, 1987, 215-16).

### *Analysis*

Although an amateur film, *A Day in Ceylon* has a sense of structure. Notably, Sergeant Roy Lister uses title cards to punctuate his day in the life of the island. The film has many of the qualities of a travelogue: there is a focus upon the exotic and the picturesque. Lister captures the spectacle of the elephant ceremony, featuring decorated people and animals. The film opens with shots of trees in blossom and closes with images of a stunning sunset. There is also a sense of movement. At one point Lister films from a rickshaw as he is borne through the streets. He also captures the dynamism of the local people. As well as shooting several street and market scenes, he films Ceylonese boys playing in a canal. A further quality shared with the travelogue genre is an extensive use of long shots and panned shots, which are employed to document the townscapes and landscapes of Ceylon.

As well as focusing on some of the traditional aspects of Ceylonese life, Lister also captures something of the colonial influence on the island. Alongside the footage of market traders he depicts the heavier industry of the Colombo docks. The busy street scenes are interspersed with portraits of large municipal buildings and the homes of officials. Among these is the suitably palatial 'Queen's House', now known as the President's House, but then the residency of the governor of Ceylon. Until 1980 the gardens surrounding this property served as a public park. Lister films locals enjoying these formal surroundings, and he focuses upon the park's large statue of Queen Victoria, which was dismantled in 2006.

One interesting aspect of this film is the way in which it depicts the impact of the War on Ceylonese life. There is surprisingly little footage of Allied troops, either at work or at leisure, but the film does illustrate the buoyant wartime economy, which can be witnessed by the trading activity in the markets. The film also shows the increased social tempo of city life: large crowds can be seen queuing outside a cinema to see Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). There is in addition footage that captures the overt intrusion of War. Checkpoints are depicted and there is an extended sequence that shows a fire at the docks of either Colombo or Trincomalee, albeit that this is not the fire occasioned by the Japanese attack.



For Lister the fire is an event to be sequenced among the other spectacles that he has witnessed. It is not allowed to dominate the film and is merely given the intertitle 'fire at the docks'. It might be due to the cameraman's own sensibilities, but there is a sense throughout this film of life continuing, despite the wartime conditions. This is underlined when the traditional elephant ceremony follows on from the fire. However, it receives its most peculiar manifestation in the film's final title card. Despite the damage wrought at the docks, the film's sunset denouement is heralded with the words 'the end of a perfect day'.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

*Works cited*

Jackson, Ashley, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006).

Kirby, S. Woodburn, et al, *The War Against Japan: Vol II India's Most Dangerous Hour* (London: HMSO, 1958).

Louis, Wm. Roger, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century*, ed. by Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 1-46.

de Silva, Chandra Richard, *Sri Lanka: A History* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1987).

Titles

**A NATIVE STREET IN INDIA**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4610>

Technical Data

Year:

1906

Running Time:

2 minutes

Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

Colour:

Black/White

Sound:

Silent

Footage:

126 ft

Production Credits

Production Company

Walturdaw Company

*Synopsis*

A street busy with pedestrians and animal-drawn carts is filmed from a static camera position. Many of the Indian men are naked to the waist, some carry loads, several men and women carry umbrellas against the sun. No Europeans are visible. To the left side of the street are stalls with awnings over (126ft).

*Context*

The Walturdaw Film Company began trading in 1904, its name deriving from the surnames of its founders, J.D. Walker, E.G. Turner, and G.H. Dawson. Walker and Turner had first formed a partnership in 1896, and they were the first people in Britain to rent out films (McKernan). The Walturdaw company was itself originally formed as a film rental business, but began to produce its own films in 1905. Prior to the First World War it was considered to be one of the leading film companies in Britain ('Walturdaw Company').

In their 1905-06 edition the *Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal* previewed ‘some remarkable films of Indian life’ made by the Walturdaw company (OPCJ, 1905-1906, 149). This enthusiastic review boasted that Walturdaw’s films were ‘taken by their own operators’ and that the films were the ‘best educational animated pictures yet before the public’. This series of films varied in length, and included a long feature about life on the River Ganges, as well as a film about ‘idol worship’, which depicted ‘in gruesome detail the horrible self-imposed tortures of the worshippers’ (OPCJ, 1905-1906, 149). The shorter films covered particular Indian subjects, such as *A Procession of Lepers*, *Sacred Bathing*, *Caste Marks*, *Scenes at the Mahorrian Festival*, *The Devil Drivers*, *Sacred Elephants*, and this film, *A Native Street in India*. For the journal, the value of these films lay in their comprehensiveness (‘they embrace almost every phase of Indian life’) and in their unprecedented subject matter (‘an impression of native observances that have never been put before the public in animated form’).

The early twentieth century was a period in which British and Indian life in the sub-continent was at its most segregated. Judith Brown has commented that, while Britons and Indians had mingled more freely in the earlier years of colonisation, by this period the British had become ‘a separate case in an already segregated society’ (Brown, 1994, 99). She writes of a ‘spatial segregation of British homes from areas where Indians lived, both in town and countryside’ (Brown, 1994, 98).

At the turn of the century India retained a primarily rural economy: 72% of the workforce were employed in agriculture (Brown, 1994, 112). The country remained poor. It was estimated in 1895 that the *per capita* income in India was £2.65 as opposed to £36.94 in Britain (Brown, 1994, 112). Indian society was nevertheless witnessing change. The country was becoming increasingly urban: 10% of the population lived in towns in 1901, as opposed to 8.7% in 1872 (Brown, 1994, 110). In addition, Brown claims that the expansion of transport communications was helping to integrate the country and forge a new sense of self-identity (Brown, 1994, 153).

### *Analysis*

*A Native Street in India*, made in 1906, introduces a subject that recurs frequently in factual films of India made by the British: that of the teeming market street in a town or city. In later films (see, for example, *The Fair City of Udaipur* (1934), or *Darjeeling – A Foot-Hill Town* (1937)), market streets are commonly contrasted with other areas of the towns, such as their official buildings or palaces. The market is shown to be the preserve of the ‘ordinary’ people, who live in a world that is apart from the colonial offices or royal buildings. Correspondingly, while the market scenes are full of humanity, these other areas of the towns are comparatively devoid of people. This short film does

not have time for such contrasts. In this case it is the film's title that illustrates that this thoroughfare is the preserve of 'the people': this is a *native* street in India.

The cameraman utilises what becomes one of the most common ways of filming market scenes: the whole sequence is filmed from a static position in the centre of the street, allowing the activity to pass before the camera. At no point does the cameraman or any other member of the crew enter the frame. This reinforces the idea that this is the 'native' area of the town; it also means the sequence becomes hard to date or situate. Robin Baker has written that 'Unfortunately, given the lack of clearly recognisable features, it seems to be impossible to identify the city' in this film (Baker). It could be argued that this is intentional on the filmmakers' behalf: this market street is representative of other such streets in India. The title of the film helps to reinforce this point.

Indeed, this market scene has much in common with those filmed in other Indian cities or towns at different times. The people's clothing, for the most part, is traditional; the vehicles are not motorised, instead they are drawn by oxen or by men; some of the people carry goods upon their heads; the goods in the stores (although not clearly visible in this film) are foodstuffs or they are handcrafted. There are, however, features that are particular to this sequence. Several of the men have distinctive face paint, and in amongst the crowds young Indian girls can be seen who are wearing western clothing of the period. One wears a white shirt and a dark ankle length skirt; another wears a white dress and has her hair in a ponytail.

Another feature of this film that recurs in later studies of market scenes is the people's reaction to the camera. Although the camera remains static, it is far from a neutral presence. The people register their interest in the camera; they stare back at it as it stares at them. In early films such as this there is often a great deal of curiosity about the process of being filmed. Here, one young boy stops and assumes a position almost as static as that of the camera itself. Meanwhile, people gather screen right, all absorbed by the filmmakers' activity.

**Richard Osborne (April 2010)**

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Title:

**A ROAD IN INDIA**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/818>

Title Ref: Sift 66939

Director: NIETER, Hans M.

Prod. Country: US GB

Year: 1938

1st Release: 1938 1st.TX (C.): 1938 Prd:

Prodn. Company: World Window Inc. U.S.A.

Release Country: GB

Release date: 1938

Format: 35

Run Time (Mins): 9

Length:

Colour Code: C

Colour System: TECH

Sound System: SOUN

Language: ENG

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

Credits:

Directed by NIETER, Hans (C)

(c) World Window Inc. U.S.A.

a World Window production World Window

Distributed by United Artists

Produced by KELLER, E.S.

Produced by KELLER, F.W.

Technicolor Photography CARDIFF, Jack

Edited by NIETER, Hans (C)

In Technicolor

Music FUSCO, Giovanni

Sound System Western Electric Mirrophonic

**Synopsis**

Life on a road in India, showing the traffic, people and animals.

Main title and credits (48). Bullock and camel carts on a country road in India (124). Travelling shot from road of Muslim hermitage. Ground view – The hermitage hut is perched on a low hill. Surrounding it are poles holding white pottery jars - placed there by women for fertility. Two Muslim men pray (169). Bullock carts pass elephants feeding – pan of the elephants feeding under the shade of trees and tended by their handlers (239). The elephants bathing in a river (281). Two yogis sitting on a wall – one with his arm raised. A small caravan of a rajah passes in state. The rajah is carried in an ornate litter and preceded by his sword-bearers walking backwards. He is also accompanied by two dancing girls who dance beside the litter and two drummers. His wife, in a less ornate litter, follows behind (410). Boy leads a sacred cow with a blue ribbon around its neck indicating its status as a sacred cow (438). A motor bus stops on the road, a Muslim woman (heavily veiled) is carried past in a litter (481). Two camel carts on the road. They pass a man painting his sheep with lines and spots of paint. It is Ramadan and no food can be consumed by Muslims – so they decorate their sheep (531). A large well – women draw water from the well, helped by two bullocks which assist by walking down a ramp beside the well (582). The caravans take rest at noon – carts, bullocks and travellers resting in a village (634). A snake charmer with two snakes (680). A man with performing animals – a goat balances on a small stump; a monkey then rides its back; the monkey does somersaults, dances and plays the drum - intercut with views of the watching crowd (771). The travellers resting in a village (817). Ox carts pass along the road and travel into the distance (874). The End (889ft).

### *Context*

*A Road in India* is one of a number of travelogue films made by the company World Window in the late 1930s. The company was the brainchild of the wealthy husband and wife team F.W. Keller and E.S. Keller. Inspired by the results of their own amateur travel films, the Kellers sought out a film crew to make professional travelogues, beginning with a series of films shot in Europe and then later filming in Asia (Cardiff, 1996, 50). World Window was formed specifically to produce these ten-minute documentaries, which were distributed in Britain and America by the American company United Artists. For *A Road in India* the core crew consisted of director and editor Hans Nieter and cinematographer Jack Cardiff, allied with the talents of musical composer Giovanni Fusco, who would later achieve fame providing the soundtracks to several of Michelangelo Antonioni's films.

The World Window documentaries are notable for their employment of Technicolor film, which, according to Jez Stewart, was the first colour process 'to provide a lifelike, cost-effective system on a

large scale, which satisfied audiences and exhibitors alike' (Stewart). Stewart notes that the cumbersome camera equipment involved 'made it difficult to capture natural occurrences on film' (Stewart). Jack Cardiff was one of the earlier acknowledged masters of Technicolor, and would later receive a cinematography Oscar for his recreation of India in *Black Narcissus* (1947), a film that was shot entirely in the studio. When approached by the Kellers he had warned them of the difficulty and expense of using Technicolor equipment in the field. The couple acceded to his requests for a support crew, tracking dolly, camera crane and well-upholstered van (Cardiff, 1996, 50).

Although this film studiously eschews any mention of politics or of Indian advancement, the period in which it was shot was one of significant gains for Indian nationalists. The 1935 Government of India Act agreed in principle to a 'Federation of India' and also granted a large degree of autonomy to provincial governments. In the following 1937 elections the Indian National Congress assumed power in several of the provinces.

This film instead focuses on the life that exists along an unspecified stretch of Indian road. The film is prone to some of the criticisms levelled at British documentaries made by Dhruva Gupta in his article 'Image of India in Colonial Films'. Gupta argues that 'The colonial film-makers legitimize colonial rule in India . . . to depict this land of "the other" as a place without much movement of "progress", of exotic rituals, wild animals, primordial villages with superstitious people' (Gupta, 1995, 259).

### **Analysis**

*A Road in India* is not a conventional travel film. It does not focus on a core group of protagonists moving towards their goal. There is no sense of destination or of advance. In each scene the camera primarily remains rooted in one position; rather than heading forward it allows the disparate traffic of India to pass before it. On display there are Muslims and Hindus and paupers and princes: this road is meant to be reflective of all India. No major landmarks are featured and the location of the road is never given.

All this serves the filmmakers well. Progress is not a concern of this documentary. Instead it depicts an India in which 'the dawn of the world is just around the corner'. The road serves as 'a ribbon of the present, threading the fantastic centuries of ancient India'. For the filmmakers the east is 'enigmatic and disturbing', and the people who populate it 'are of yesterday and all the ages back into the remote times'. Thus it delivers a retinue of snake charmers, street entertainers, yogis and rajas.



The film even attempts to discern the native factor that ‘made mechanical invention unnecessary’, hitting upon the idea that ‘it may well be due to the working elephant that in India the science of dynamics never got beyond the wooden wheel’.

There are in addition practical reasons why there is no forward motion in this film: the heavy Technicolor equipment would not have facilitated shots filmed from a moving vehicle. Jack Cardiff’s cinematography is instead dependent on the dynamics that can be achieved with panning shots, tracking shots and the movement on the road itself. These devices are employed to deliver one of the film’s recurring tropes: the commentary talks of ‘that weird contrast which is India’ and the ‘contrast which forever typifies the Indian road’. Cardiff delivers these contrasts by the use of panning movements, which surprise us with the unexpected combinations that they bring to the screen. One panning movement takes us from half-naked yogis towards a richly attired raja, while another moves from camel-yoked carts towards a Muslim decorating his sheep as part of his Ramadan observance. Elsewhere Cardiff films an overheated omnibus being overtaken by a palanquin, ‘a type of vehicle which has not changed for more than 2000 years’. He uses his tracking shots to gradually unveil various aspects of village life: covered women, al fresco barbers, cotton spinning, gossiping travellers.

As with other films in the *World Window* series, the film’s content has been determined by the company’s desire to make best use of the Technicolor process. Jack Cardiff delivers the ‘kaleidoscope of colour’ that is outlined in the commentary, most notably by focussing on the vibrant materials that make up the Indians’ clothes. His work received praise in contemporary reviews. *Today’s Cinema*, for example, remarked upon the film’s ‘exquisite Technicolor production’ (TC, 22 May 1940, 21). Today, it is the element of the film that is most highly valued. Robin Baker has talked of the cinematography providing ‘compelling viewing’ (Baker).

At times it can be compelling for unintended reasons. This film describes India being a land in which ‘fact and fantasy are yoked together’, but one of its problems is that these ingredients have been deliberately assembled. It is clear that the juxtapositions captured by Cardiff’s camera haven’t occurred by chance, but have been intentionally arranged and choreographed. Similarly, the combination of colours has been put together with forethought. Moreover, if the ‘fantasy’ elements of this film can be called into question, so can its ‘facts’. Of particular note is the relentless concentration on the ‘backwardness’ of India. The film is also clumsy when it attempts to provide background details. For example, on witnessing a Muslim woman in burqa the viewer is informed that her religion forbids the world ‘the smallest inkling of her charms’. Finally, what further

undermines the film is its neglect of one of contemporary India's most vivid contrasts: at no point in this documentary do the British enter the frame.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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## Titles

**A STRING OF BEADS A TEA GARDEN IDYLL**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/510>

## Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Running Time:

27 minutes

\* Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film, Digibeta

\* Colour:

Black/White

\* Sound:

Sound

\* Footage:

3000

## Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

Great Britain

\* Commentator

STRINGER, Lewis

\* Director

KEENE, Ralph

\* Producer

KEENE, Ralph

\* Script

LEE, Laurie

\* Sponsor

National Tea Board

\* Assistant Editor

HOLDING, Harold

\* Assistant Photographer

FADER, Teddy

\* Assistant Photographer

SMITH, Emma

\* Cast Member

MANGRI

\* Cast Member

RAMDAS

\* Editor

TRUMPER, John

\* Music

LUTYENS, Elisabeth

\* Music Director

HOLLINGSWORTH, John

\* Photography

STILL, George

\* Production Company

Film Producers Guild

\* Production Company

Greenpark Productions

## Synopsis

Story of two workers, Ramdas and Mangri, in an Indian tea-garden and description of Indian village life in Assam. Bullock carts arrive at the market of Lakhmijian ('Garden of the River Goddess') near the Assam River where Naga tribesmen come down from the hills to trade with tea-garden workers. Tribesman in traditional dress, carrying loads wrapped with dried palm fronds. Workers cross bamboo bridge over river. Ramdas bathes in the river, then brings a duck wrapped in a sling on a pole to the market in order to sell it and buy a present for his fiancée Mangri. Mangri returns home from work. Scenes of home life. She leaves home along a jungle path with a load of laundry to wash in the river. Ramdas hunts birds with a bow and arrow. Peasants in the background preparing paddy dykes. He stalks and shoots a bird, later presenting it with beads to Mangri. Ramdas uses home-made pigments to paint his whitewashed walls with pictures of birds and flowers to commemorate the marriage. Scenes of marriage-proposal journey by Ramdas and his family to Mangri's home, being received on low stools and offered betel-nut 'pans' whilst discussing dowry (two goats, clothes and silver jewellery) and the wedding date. The wedding. Guests gathering under a canopy in bride's home, depositing gifts (a lantern and a brass plate) as drums beat a pipers play. The bride adorns herself for the ceremony and is then borne in seated in a basket. The bridegroom, in elaborate head-dress daubs a spot on the bride's forehead whilst their gowns are tied together. They return to work

accompanied by Indian folk songs. At night Mangri prepares an evening meal and is examined by the midwife. A 'garden hospital' where Mangri gives birth whilst the rest of the family bring in the harvest. Ramdas visits a silversmith, whom we see smelting and beating out metal, and buys a gift for the baby. Ramdas visits mother and child and adorns the latter with a silver necklace. Mother and child return to the tea-garden, where the baby lies on a mat whilst his mother picks tea. The narration says that these are the inheritors of the bounty of the land of the River Goddess.

### Context

*A String of Beads: A Tea Garden Idyll* was produced on the cusp of independence in India: work on the film began in 1946/47 and it was released in 1948. The film was made by Greenpark Productions, which developed as a major producer of government and corporate films during the Second World War. This film was made for the National Tea Board, the commission coming via the Film Producers Guild, a consortium body that channelled industrial film commissions to its member companies (Russell). According to Patrick Russell and James Piers Taylor, the film, alongside *Cyprus is an Island* (1946) and *Three Dawns to Sydney* (1948) 'set the pattern for Greenpark's post-war production: lyrical and literate, award-winning, international and essentially apolitical' (Russell and Taylor, 2010, 44).

The film has a respected production crew. It was directed by Ralph Keene, one of the foremost documentary filmmakers of the 1940s and Managing Director of Greenpark. It was edited by John Trumper, who would later edit *The Italian Job* (1969) and *Get Carter* (1971). Its score was created by Elisabeth Lutyens, the noted modernist composer and the first female composer to score a British feature film (Huckvale, 2008, 54), as well as a prolific composer for documentaries. And its script was written by Laurie Lee, who had earlier worked with Keene on *Cyprus is an Island*, a film that Greenpark produced for the Ministry of Information. (Lee was one of several noted British authors, including Dylan Thomas and H.E. Bates, to have been employed by Greenpark.)

*A String of Beads* did not garner the same attention as the earlier Lee/Keene collaboration. While *Cyprus is an Island* was praised as being 'possibly the best documentary of the quarter' by *Sight and Sound* (Spring 1947, 42) and brought forth the book *We Made a Film in Cyprus* (1947) by Lee and Keene, *A String of Beads* received lesser notice, although it was reviewed positively by the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, who regarded it as being suitable for adults, adolescents and family audiences (*MFB*, 30 April 1948, 44). There also remains some confusion about the production. Peter Noble states that

Lee and Keene travelled to India in 1946 to make the film (Noble, 1959, 161), but Richard Barsam believes – presumably erroneously – that Keene shot the film in Ceylon (Barsam, 1992, 244).

Lee's commentary locates the film in Assam, the largest tea-growing region in India and the only region of the sub-continent where tea is an indigenous plant. The first British tea plantations in Assam were created in the 1830s, with production relying on imported, and originally indentured, labour. Most of the early workers came from nearby Bengal and they faced appalling conditions, both on their journeys to Assam and in the plantations. Rox Moxham has calculated that by 1900 over 200,000 acres of tea had been planted at the cost of 'several hundred thousand' Indian lives (Moxham, 2003, 153). Workers were tied to employment on the estates for contract periods of 3-5 years; the estates were guarded; and flogging of men and women 'was almost ubiquitous' (Moxham, 2003, 136, 143, 144).

In the twentieth century employment conditions on the estates were made better. Basic medical facilities were introduced; there was improvement in the workers' housing; some labourers were allowed their own plots of land on which to produce food; and the system of indentured labour was abolished in 1926 (Moxham, 2003, 147-48, 153). Moxham describes the situation as being 'markedly improved' by the end of British rule; however, he notes that this was down to assertive action on behalf of the workers, in addition to the more liberal attitudes of some of the estate managers (Moxham, 2003, 186-87). Serious mismanagement on some of the Assam estates had prompted rioting, and in the late 1920s the workers had started to unionise, successfully campaigning for increased wages (Moxham, 2003, 188-89).

Following independence the tea industry was considered for nationalisation by the Indian government. Consequently, many British companies 'took fright and began to run their estates down' (Moxham, 2003, 2007). They also sold their estates: by 1970 about half of the total acreage was under Indian control. Employment relations on many of these estates have remained problematic; Moxham believes that it is in Assam, 'where the legacy is so bitter', that this problem is greatest (Moxham, 2003, 185).

### **Analysis**

*A String of Beads* has various aims. One is to present employment conditions on the tea estates as being humane and benevolent; another is to show that the estates are productive and well run.

However, the method chosen to present these aims – depicting life in Assam as ‘a tea-garden idyll’ – makes them somewhat difficult to reconcile.

To create their idyll the filmmakers chose to focus on a series of key events in the lives of a young couple, Ramdas and Mangri: their courtship, their marriage, and the birth of their first child. To this end workers of the tea estate are employed in acting roles; the *Monthly Film Bulletin* praised the lead couple for being ‘completely unselfconscious’ and also commended the ‘charm and humour’ of the enactment of the story (*MFB*, 30 April 1948, 44). Their rituals are sensitively portrayed and are covered in some detail. The film explains the negotiations that are involved leading up to the marriage, and the crew apparently worked hard to make the wedding appear ‘authentic’, as only members of the same caste could be filmed together in these scenes (*MFB*, 30 April 1948, 44). The film also benefits from the production talents of its crew. It is skilfully shot, for example employing panning movements that move from landscapes towards individuals, thus mirroring the story’s progression from the general to the personal; Lutyens music is sympathetic, using both Indian and western art music idioms to dramatise the story; and Laurie Lee’s script provides deeper characterisation than always to be expected of sponsored films.

Ramdas and Mangri’s story provides opportunities to show the foresight of the employers, in particular in revealing the maternity provisions on the estate. The pastoral bliss of the young couple and the role of the tea estate are not always so easily brought together, however. In fact, to depict an idyll the tea-garden sometimes has to be removed. In the opening scenes we first see Ramdas beyond its bounds, buying his string of beads at the local market; we are told that ‘all the morning is his, all the river is’. The couple’s initial meeting also takes place at a distance from the estate’s compound. We see Mandri at the end of her working day journeying away from the cultivated tea-gardens, ‘through the living colours of her country’, to the wilderness of the jungle, where Ramdas is shown hunting a bird; when they come across each other Ramdas makes a gift of his beads to her: ‘the hunter has found his prize’.

The film also has a need to depict the work of the estate, and here it is surprisingly frank in showing how the young couple’s lives are circumscribed. The morning after their wedding we are informed that ‘the short, sharp holiday is over and Ramdas and Mandri awake to their new life, which is their old life, their life of work and wages’. Similarly, after their child’s birth they soon return to the gardens, accompanied by ‘the first of their family’, who is lain on a blanket as they return to work. While they are depicted as being happy in their employment, the film has no qualms about

underlining their endeavour, admitting that Mandri's 'body is tired, her fingers are stained from the green leaves'. But who are they working for? The film removes almost all traces of white people from its depiction of the estate (there is just one senior white worker present, captured in the distance in a large group scene). Elsewhere, Indian workers are shown in senior positions, and there is an interesting scene in which workers are shown receiving their pay and bowing in gratitude to someone who remains out of shot.

Is there a larger metaphor at work in this film? It was made as India moved from being a colony to being a commonwealth country, achieving independence but still linked economically to Britain. Here the workers on the tea estates are shown to have assumed control over certain aspects of their own lives – the film concludes with its shots of the young family in the tea garden, stating that 'they are its children and its inheritors' – they are nevertheless shown as being reassuringly hardworking, loyal and productive.

**Richard Osborne (June 2010)**

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Title:

**A VILLAGE IN INDIA**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4676>

Title Ref: Sift 16115

Director: HANAU, John

Prod. Country : GB

Year: 1940

1st Release : 1940 1st.TX (C.): 1938 Prd:

Prodn. Company: World Window

Release Country: GB

Format: 35

Run Time (Mins): 9

Length:

Colour Code : C

Colour System: TECH

Sound System : SOUN

Language : ENG

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

Credits:

Directed by HANAU, John

Production Company World Window

Produced by KELLER, E.S.

Produced by KELLER, F.W.

Technicolor Photography CARDIFF, Jack

Editor NIETER, Hans (C)

Music MICUCCI, Edoardo

Logo Western Electric Mirrophonic

*Synopsis*

Indian village life including a Brahmin initiation ceremony and a Hindu wedding.

Peasant life in a village in Rajputana. Early morning in the village; worshippers enter a Hindu temple as a gong is sounded (155). The village well; peasants, though poorly clothed are particular about

personal hygiene; they wash beside the well and their teeth with twigs pulled from trees (210). Weaving and spinning (310). Hand block printing onto cotton (348). A Hindu superstition – a man and his wife prepare to leave their house but as they turn into the road the man sneezes as he passes their gate, so they turn back into the house because this is an evil omen (379). This village is peopled by Brahmins: the women of this highest caste at the village well; an old man begs water from them. Because his touch will contaminate any drinking vessel the water is poured into cupped hands (411). Second Hindu superstition – the same man and his wife leave and see a cat sitting on a wall; this evil omen is cancelled by the good omen of a woman passing by carrying a water pitcher on her head (442). The villagers enjoy a wrestling bout (543). A marriage procession; the oldest married woman in the community bestows the 'pujah' (?) the Brahmin caste mark consisting of a red dot placed in the centre of the forehead (625). Two small boys are initiated into the community of adult worshippers – Brahmin priest places necklace around their necks; the sacred rules of the Brahmin are whispered to them (706). Night time celebration of a Hindu wedding at which a small band is playing; the bride and groom (760). Fire breaks out and the villagers run from the burning buildings (860). Next day the villagers return to survey the remains from which a new village will rise (929ft).

### *Context*

*A Village in India* is one of a number of travelogue films made by the company World Window in the late 1930s. The company was the brainchild of the wealthy husband and wife team F.W. Keller and E.S. Keller. Inspired by the results of their own amateur travel films, the Kellers sought out a film crew to make professional travelogues, beginning with a series of films shot in Europe and then later filming in Asia (Cardiff, 1996, 50). The team that the Kellers put together included the director John Hanau, editor Hans Nieter, and the renowned cinematographer Jack Cardiff. World Window was formed specifically to produce these ten-minute documentaries, which were distributed in both Britain and America by the American company United Artists.

The films are notable for their employment of Technicolor film. Jack Cardiff was one of the early masters of this system, and would later receive a cinematography Oscar for his recreation of India in *Black Narcissus* (1947), a film that was shot entirely in the studio. When approached by the Kellers he had warned them of the difficulty and expense of using Technicolor equipment in the field. The couple acceded to his requests for a support crew, tracking dolly, camera crane and well-upholstered van (Cardiff, 1996, 50).

The name of the village that the World Window team filmed in 1938 is not specified, its location merely noted as being in 'Rajputana'. Following independence this conglomerate of Princely States was combined with the province of Ajmer-Merwara to form Rajasthan, the largest state in the Republic of India.

Throughout the period of British rule India remained overwhelmingly rural. In 1941, out of a population of nearly 400 million, over 80% still lived in villages (Brown, 1994, 254). Pressures on production increased owing to overall population growth and the number of people dependent on agriculture per square mile of cultivated land grew from 432 in 1931 to 535 in 1941 (Brown, 1994, 254).

John Cell has argued that 'In the evolution of British efforts to understand, stereotype, and therefore manipulate "India", the concept of an ancient and ideal village community (*panch*) had a long run' (Cell, 2001, 244). He notes the importance of Sir Henry Maine's ideas in nineteenth century approaches to the sub-continent. Maine argued that in Indian villages the anthropologist could witness the precursors to capitalist society: 'miniature republics: self-contained, self-sufficient, self-regulating' (Cell, 2001, 244). It was at the village level that India was studied and administered. Cell argues, however, that 'By the 1890s investigators in India had uncovered such a wide assortment of types of villages as to raise doubts about whether any such thing as a model village community had ever existed at all' (Cell, 2001, 244). He notes that, as British officials lost faith in this idea, '[i]ronically', it was Gandhi who gave it 'a new lease of life' (Cell, 2001, 250). Several of Gandhi's beliefs were related to the social framework of the village community, where he argued that 'interdependence and co-operation were the guiding principles of relationship' (Brown, 1994, 212).

### *Analysis*

Technically, the World Window films represent a significant stride forward for documentaries shot in the sub-continent. Their use of Technicolor transforms the way in which India can be seen. Rajputana is known for the bright dyes used in its clothing, and Jack Cardiff takes full advantage of this in filming the saris of the Indian women, as well as the block-making process by which certain costumes are made. He also illuminates his scenes by shooting them from a variety of positions. A wrestling match, for example, features distance shots, close-ups, point-of-view shots and shots from reverse angles. Cardiff is adept in his use of panning and tracking shots, which are employed extensively but not intrusively. These devices do however have an effect on the structure of the film; panning and tracking shots are both used so that the camera can gradually bring more visual

elements to the picture. For example, a backwards tracking motion in the opening scenes captures the opposing forwards movement of some worshippers as they arrive at the village temple.

The cumbersome Technicolor equipment, together with accepted documentary practice at the time, may have influenced the fact that several of the film's scenes are staged. In order to have been captured effectively with tracking and dolly shots, scenes would have needed to be rehearsed and choreographed. This can sometimes jar slightly, as when Indian villagers are employed to re-enact their superstitions, scenes that are largely staged for the western audience's amusement. Similarly, the climax of the film, in which the village is set alight to illustrate the dangers of fire, comes across as overly dramatic in this purported documentary.

There is no attempt to distinguish this Indian village from any other. Moreover, the commentary attempts to lump together all of the world's peasants. The film begins by disclosing that 'The world over, villagers and peasants have something in common: their skins may differ in colour; their clothes may be of a different pattern and the climates they live in may differ to extremes, but everywhere peasants are akin in their love for the soil they till and the animals they raise'. It concludes by praising 'the gift of stubborn tenacity, peculiar to peasants'. Village life, in this film, is regarded as consisting primarily of subsistence, religion and superstition. What is more, villagers are regarded as being satisfied with their lot: 'They are content if they can build their houses, clothe themselves and cook their food from the materials yielded by the jungle forest on the fringes of which they live'.

This line of narrative is followed by an image of a villager using a spinning wheel. Spinning homespun cloth was advocated by Gandhi as a political act; a symbolic and economic rejection of colonial power (Gandhi had felt it wrong that many Indians brought their clothes from industrial manufacturers owned by British interests). The appearance of the spinning wheel in this village is indicative of the fact that the locals had ambitions beyond the limited horizons that have been described. Moreover, the film even admits to Gandhi's influence, stating that 'Since the advent of Mahatma Gandhi weaving and spinning have been re-established'. It does not, however, detail the thinking behind this act. Instead, the narrative moves directly on to British attempts to increase crop yields (once again indicating that village life is not free from outside interference). 'Owing to the enormous importance of the working of the land', the commentary states, 'British administration is trying to educate villagers to a more modern manner of farming'.

Nevertheless, the film does not come across as being a propaganda exercise for the British. Instead it is an odd assemblage. It presents a universalised village in isolation. It combines factual information with staged sequences. And it is driven more by the desire to capture Technicolor images than by the need to convey a rounded portrayal of Indian village life. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as today the cinematography enables us to experience the colours that were central to village traditions. It should be noted, however, that this wasn't necessarily how critics originally viewed this film. While the *Kinematograph Weekly* noted that the 'Treatment [is] somewhat pedestrian but colour photography very good' (KM, 5 September 1940 23), *Today's Cinema* praised the 'agreeably restrained' commentary, noting that it is 'unaffected yet well-informed' (TC, 7 August 1940, 12).

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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Title:

**ACHIEVEMENT IN HONG KONG**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4438>

Title Ref: Sift[?]15660

Director: ?

Prod. Country: GB

Year: 1958

Production Company: Leander Films

Release Date: 1958

Format: 16mm

Length: ?

Colour Code: Colour

Sound System: Sound

Credits:

Photography EVANS, Julius [title card says 'From Original Material Photographed by Julius Evans']

Sponsor Foreign Office [this is from the BFI database, not from the film's credits]

Sponsor Central Office of Information [this is from the BFI database, not from the film's credits. Closing title card says 'C.O.I. Crown Copyright reserved']

[National Archive records have credits as: Directed by – Julius Evans and Joan Duff; Produced by – Joan Duff; Commentator – Jack Holmes]

**Synopsis**

DOCUMENTARY. How Hong Kong's rehousing programme coped with the large influx of Chinese in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Titles (9). Establishing shots of Hong Kong and the harbour. The British built a western style city but it has managed to retain an essentially Chinese character. Shots of sampans and junks at Aberdeen on the south side of Hong Kong island. Shipping in the harbour (114). Ferries to Kowloon. Scenes of paddy fields in the New Territories (165). Kowloon railway station. British institutions: fire brigade, war memorial and courts of justice. These British

features of life attracted a large number of Chinese across the border, numbers which were swelled by the civil war in China. As a result of the huge increase in the population shanty towns spring up on the hillsides around Hong Kong (251). Model villages built by welfare organisations cannot cope. Scenes in the shanty towns (320). Fire in one of the shanty towns makes 60,000 homeless. Scenes of the devastation with people picking over the remains and queuing for food (380). Explanation of the government's rehousing programme. Blocks of flats built in the shape of a capital H. Each family has one room measuring 12ft by 10ft. Shots of the blocks under construction and occupied (507). More general shots of the blocks and scenes in Hong Kong in general (540ft). [16mm].

### Context

*Achievement in Hong Kong* was made in 1958 by the production company Leander Films for the British government's Central Office of Information. This latter organisation was founded in 1946 as a peacetime successor to the Ministry of Information, its purpose being to provide information campaigns for government departments, both at home and overseas. The footage was selected from library material shot by Julius Evans for his films 'Hong Kong' and 'Miracle in Hong Kong', which the COI purchased for £250 ('Achievement in Hong Kong'). Joan Duff of Leander Films provided the script, and Jack Holmes spoke the commentary. However, these names are absent from the credits, which the COI advised 'be kept to the minimum length' ('Achievement in Hong Kong'). The National Archives files on this film provide no indication of where the film was shown, other than to state that the US has a copy.

Hong Kong, located on the southern coast of China, became a dependent territory of the United Kingdom in 1842. Frank Welsh has described its position in the mid-1950s as being that of a 'precariously stable boat' (Welsh, 1993, 458). Following initial alarm and refortification of the territory in response to the coming to power of Mao Zedong's Communist Party in China in 1949, the British had resumed their *laissez-faire* attitude towards Hong Kong of 'benign neglect' (Welsh, 1993, 453; see also Ngo, 1999, 119-40). Although the Communist Party considered Hong Kong to be a rightful part of China, it had transpired that they had no immediate plans to invade. Moreover, by the mid-1950s the British had few strategic interests in the Far East. Military presence in Hong Kong was therefore reduced.

There were further consequences of the Communist triumph in China, however. After Mao's party assumed power there was a large influx of refugees into Hong Kong. In 1950 alone nearly three quarters of a million crossed the border. Many of the incomers lived in makeshift accommodation; Alan Smart estimates that by 1953 this sector of the population numbered 300,000 (Smart, 2006, 171). According to Frank Welsh the colonial authorities regarded these incomers as 'squatters' who 'were there on sufferance'. He states that 'little obligation to provide anything more than the essential minimum for them was accepted by the Hong Kong authorities' (Welsh, 1993, 444).

There has been debate over when and why policy began to change. The 'achievement' referred to in this film's title is the development of a public housing programme, centred on a series of high-rise buildings, soon to become characteristic of Hong Kong. The main prompt for this initiative is commonly regarded as being the fire in the refugee area of Shek Kep Mei on Christmas Day 1953, which left 53,000 people homeless. However, Alan Smart has argued that it was a series of fires, both before and after this event, that shaped the authorities' housing policy (Smart, 2006). It has also been suggested that this rethink was a response to the potential for Chinese agitation and civil disturbance sparked by colonial neglect of the homeless (Welsh, 1993, 3).

By the end of 1956 some 23,300 tenement rooms had been built, largely financed by the colony's own resources, but with some support from America and China. It was only when the United States provided a grant that the Colonial Office was 'shamed into matching it' (Welsh, 1993, 454). Previously, Governor Alexander Grantham's pleas had fallen on deaf ears: 'I requested financial assistance from H.M.G. I begged, I pleaded, I wrote despatches, I wrote letters, I spoke to officials, I spoke to ministers. But all in vain, we got nothing' (Welsh, 1993, 455).

### **Analysis**

*Achievement in Hong Kong* is a carefully measured film. The narrative balances those elements of the territory that the colonisers have altered against those they have left alone. We are informed that 'when the British first came to Hong Kong the island was a barren place, the waters around it pirate-infested; today it is one of the greatest commercial centres in the Far East', but we also learn that the population is 'largely Chinese' and that these people have 'brought to the city their own ways, customs and manner of living which the British have not tried to change'. We thus learn of both the beneficence and lenience of British rule. This structure enables the British to take credit for certain



aspects of colonial rule while absolving themselves of some of the problems that have arisen in the territory.

The dual character of Hong Kong is outlined in the opening sequences of the film. It begins with panoramic scenes of the harbour, followed by views of the modern financial institutions in the city of Victoria, then by scenes of Chinese locals in this city, and then by shots of Chinese boats of ancient design in the village of Aberdeen. The number of people depicted in these scenes gradually increases. This device serves several purposes. It intimates that any overcrowding in Hong Kong is Chinese in origin. It also illustrates the burgeoning industry of the territory and the attraction of that industry to newcomers. We are informed that 'British institutions, British justice and efficient methods of administration' have facilitated Hong Kong's prosperity and that 'This success, and the way in which the island managed its affairs, attracted the Chinese'.

At this point there is a decisive switch to densely populated street scenes. The narrative informs us of the massive increase in numbers occasioned by the civil war in China. The resultant 'crazy ramshackle villages' in the harbours and on the hillsides are shown. The film exposes certain tensions in the colonial response. The narrative is at pains to point out that 'the administration and church welfare organisation raised funds to build settlements and model villages', but it also reveals that the colonial authorities looked upon these incomers as squatters: 'living rent-free on Crown land [...] they fiercely resisted any attempt to move them, they could not be persuaded to go home'. At the same time there is an urge to offer a balanced portrayal: the Chinese are praised for being industrious, and we are shown refugee homes that are as 'neat and clean as their owners could make them'.

The film climaxes with the Shek Kep Mei fire and the subsequent rehousing programme. The fire is dramatically staged. There is a cut to a close-up of a petrol lamp and then another quick cut to the fire breaking out. Music increases in both volume and stridency. In contrast, the film of the rehousing programme is edited and narrated at a steady tempo, mirroring what is portrayed as being an organised response to the crisis on behalf of the authorities. Although the housing plans are outlined in detail there is no mention of the help provided by the Chinese and the United States. There is also a surprising admission of the political climate that prompted the authorities' response: 'The majority of these people had come uninvited into the already overcrowded colony but in the eyes of the world the government was responsible for their wellbeing'. Accordingly: 'Hong Kong could not afford the reputation of the fire of Shek Kep Mei'.

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FILM NUMBER

BAY 232-1

FILM TITLE:

**AIR FORCE AND JAPS DOWNED, BURMA, 30 JANUARY 1942**

SCENES IN BOMB DAMAGED RANGOON, BURMA, 28 JANUARY 1942 [Allocated]

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5585>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1942

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

British Paramount News

SHORT SUMMARY:

Mute, unedited footage shot by British Paramount News cameraman Maurice Ford in Burma

FULL SUMMARY:

Burma, 30 January 1942. American Volunteer Group (AVG), Two Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk fighter aircraft warming up for take-off on a dusty airstrip. Panning shot across airstrip. Tomahawk aircraft taking off. Another Tomahawk aircraft taxiing to take-off, partially obscured by dust. Brief long shots of aircraft in the sky. Brief shot of an American Volunteer Group (AVG) jeep driving across the airstrip. Brief shot of petrol bowser driving across the airstrip. Long shot of Tomahawk aircraft in the sky. Long shot over airstrip following Japanese (?) aircraft in the sky. Long shot of the Japanese (?) aircraft doing a "loop" and crashing behind some low buildings and trees on the edge of the airstrip. Brief out of focus scenes of a man with the "thumbs-up" sign to the camera. Long shot of the Japanese (?) aircraft flying over the airstrip. Shots of the debris of a crashed Japanese aircraft being looked over by RAF personnel. Close-ups of the wreckage, various views.

Rangoon, Burma 28 January 1942. Shots along deserted wide suburban streets. Travelling shot along another deserted wide suburban street. Close-ups of several posters on a wall: "Rangoon must not burn. Join the AFS", " Don't desert your homes but protect and guard them. Join the Civil Defence Service", "There is room for every man and every woman in the Civil Defence Service. Join up at once", "Have you dug trenches? Do it now. Have you got water? Have you got sand? Get them now." Burmese men working on the construction of a brick air raid shelter in a suburban street. View along a tree lined road towards a pagoda. Various shots of the pagoda. View of an ornate Buddha seated under a canopy. View of a simpler stone Buddha in the open-air. View of a small street market. Shots of the individual street vendors and their produce including vegetables and live ducks. Shots of children. Several views of roadside barbers at work. Portrait shots of several

Burmese men. Group of men and boys smiling and clapping for the camera. Burmese men at work clearing debris from a bomb damaged area of Rangoon. Panning shot over the damaged area, mostly showing charred trees and sheets of corrugated iron. Close-up of men piling bucked and damaged sheets of corrugated iron on a Corporation of Rangoon lorry. Shot of the lorry driving away. Burmese man standing under the shade of his open umbrella, possibly overseeing the workmen. View of a large bomb damaged building. View of a pagoda, several views including an atmospheric, part shadowed, shot of a single Burmese man at prayer. Close-up of the praying man. View of the shaded courtyard. Panning shot over the numerous spires including several covered with wooden scaffolding (possibly air-raid damage).

#### NOTES:

Above stories relate to Maurice Ford's shipment numbers 107 and 106

The cameraman's original Dope Sheet notes that he "ran in front of the camera to clarify the position" - probably the unidentified man making the "thumbs-up" sign.

For the British Paramount newsreel including footage shot by Maurice Ford in Burma, 1942, see issue no 1173, IWM film ref NPA 1173.

#### RELATED ITEMS:

Cameraman's original Dope Sheet.

See also other films shot by Maurice Ford in Burma 1942.

#### PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Ford, Maurice: cameraman

#### ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

#### FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

35mm

#### NUMBER OF REELS:

1

#### LENGTH:

784 ft

#### RUNNING TIME:

8 mins

#### BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

#### SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

### Context

Ashley Jackson has described Burma as being ‘a low-priority British colony until it became one of the Empire’s major battlegrounds in the Second World War’; he adds that ‘No one [...] expected Burma to be anywhere near the fighting until it was too late to do anything about it’ (Jackson, 2006, 386, 387). In 1940 the country had come under the military control of Britain’s Far East Command, which was headquartered in Singapore. In the early stages of World War II British military personnel believed that the Japanese had little interest in Singapore; instead, it was felt that their pre-occupation would be the battle against China (Turnbull, 1988, 163). The first Japanese air attack on Singapore took place on 8 December 1941, corresponding with strikes against Pearl Harbour, Hong Kong and the Philippines. Within 70 days Britain had surrendered the port.

Jackson argues that Burma ‘never had much of a chance’ once Singapore had fallen (Jackson, 2006, 387). It was poorly equipped with both supplies and men; prior to 1941 its defence had ranked lower in priority than that of the West Indies (Jackson, 2006, 387). The Japanese 15<sup>th</sup> Army entered the Tenasserim region of Burma in December 1942, taking control of its airfields. In January 1942 the port of Rangoon was brought to a standstill: over two thousand civilians were killed in air raids and 100,000 fled the city (Jackson, 2006, 393). The British rushed troops to defend the city, which was first reached by Japanese soldiers on 8 February 1942. Rangoon fell to the Japanese on 8 March 1942, effectively closing Burma to the outside world (Jackson, 2006, 393). There then began the withdrawal of Allied forces towards India. This, the longest retreat in British military history, was followed by the longest campaign of World War II. Allied forces did not re-enter Rangoon until April 1945. During the occupation, elements among the dominant Burman ethnic group sided with the Japanese (Allen, 1984, 12-13). Burma had had a burgeoning nationalist movement prior to the War, and following independence in 1948 the country chose not to become a member of the British Commonwealth.

Maurice Ford shot the footage for *Air Force and Japs Downed* and *Scenes in Bomb Damaged Rangoon* in January 1942, for possible inclusion in the newsreels of British Paramount News. Ford first entered the film industry in 1927 as a camera assistant for British Instructional Pictures. Thereafter he worked for various companies before being employed by British Paramount News in 1936 (‘Maurice Ford’). He was one of the company’s first War correspondents, covering the early campaign in France as well as making a noted film of the inferno surrounding St Paul’s Cathedral during the

Blitz. He was later posted to South Africa and then to Burma, where he supplied both the film and the story for *Burma: A War Correspondent's Despatch* (1942), which was credited as being the 'longest newsreel ever issued by British Paramount' ('Maurice Ford'). The company would soon bill him as 'Paramount's ace war correspondent' ('Maurice Ford').

British Paramount, a subsidiary of the US Paramount Company, was founded in 1931 and was one of the five main British newsreel companies operating during World War II. Luke McKernan states that it was during this period that the newsreels 'found their voice', serving as 'an important means of communicating vital news mixed with propagandist uplift' (McKernan). McKernan and Nicholas Hiley have also argued that the newsreels could not function without 'faking' their stories (Hiley and McKernan, 2001, 192). Studying the surviving documentation of *British Paramount News* Hiley and McKernan discovered that the editors would plan stories in advance, and that the cameramen would often be expected to illustrate previously written commentaries (Hiley and McKernan, 2001, 192). They note correspondence from Maurice Ford to news editor Fred Partington in March 1944, stating that he had obtained 'scenes as requested per script' (Hiley and McKernan, 2001, 192). Nevertheless, in this footage, as with *Burma: A War Correspondent's Despatch*, it appears to be Ford who was shaping the story. His dope sheets indicate that he was filming with his own objectives in mind.

### Analysis

*Air Force and Japs Downed* was filmed on 30 January 1942, and it shows aerial combat between the British and the Japanese, as well as its aftermath. *Scenes in Bomb Damaged Rangoon* was filmed on 28 January 1942; it shows Burmese life in and around bomb-damaged Burma. Both films feature some dramatic and graphic footage. The first includes a shot of a Japanese plane attempting a loop-the-loop, but diving straight into the ground. The second captures the widespread destruction in Rangoon, including locals searching the debris for what Ford refers to as 'some poor soul'. What is notable about both films, however, is that there is no intimation that the Allied forces will soon be defeated.

In *Air Force and Japs Downed* Ford films a number of successful attacks upon Japanese aircraft. He refers to the destroyed planes as being 'all that is left of the Japaneze [sic] tourists'. Ford desired that his film would show the 'the brass hats' in England what a good job the RAF were doing. His dope sheets feature suggestions on how to use his footage to show both the readiness of the British forces and the destruction of the Japanese. He is not averse to the idea of 'faking' his material, suggesting

ways in which it can be edited to tell a coherent story. In addition, he admits that it has been ‘impossible to log this stuff on the location’, but is confident that his employers will be able to ‘sort it out successfully’.

In *Scenes in Bomb Damaged Rangoon* Ford’s selection of material, and his instructions regarding how it should be used, suggest that the Allied troops and the Burmese people will withstand the attack upon Rangoon. Although Ford is telling a deliberate story here, this was a cause in which he evidently believed. He was fiercely partisan – he would later claim that he wished to see every ‘god damned’ surrendering German shot (‘Maurice Ford’). In the dope sheets he describes the Japanese as being ‘weird little men’, whereas the Burmese are ‘innocent peace-loving souls’. He continues, ‘Thank you London, for giving these people spiritual courage to carry on, wherever I go I hear words of praise to my homeland from these people’. To this end Ford suggests that his footage be compiled so that it shows the Burmese ‘happy and carrying on to the best advantage’. His desire is to show life in Rangoon taking place as normal, whether this be the people of the suburbs shopping ‘in between air raids’ (here he includes footage of vendors selling live birds and a line of street-side barbers) or a Buddhist at prayer in the local pagoda (filmed in the sunlight that falls through a door – a beautiful image that reinforces the idea of serenity).

Ford’s dope sheets reveal that the footage of the pagodas could have taken on a more dispiriting tone. He notes that several of them had been burnt and wrecked, while others provide ‘excellent landmarks to the enemy planes’. Ford does not indicate how he wished his shots of signs posted in the streets to be used. They nevertheless demonstrate the fact that Burma was neither entirely happy nor carrying on as usual. One of them reads ‘Don’t desert your homes but protect and guard them’.

**Richard Osborne (June 2010)**

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FILM TITLE:

**ALERT IN THE EAST**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2467>

PRODUCTION DATE:

9/1941

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Ministry of Information

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

British Movietone News

SHORT SUMMARY:

A survey of the strategic situation of the British Empire in the Far East in the face of "an outside" threat (obviously Japan).

FULL SUMMARY:

The film, like the pattern of strength it seeks to portray, is based on Singapore ("one of the ramparts of that freedom for which the British Empire stands"), with film of the 1938 opening of base facilities. With Aden, Singapore guarantees control of the Indian Ocean, enabling India (with no worries about her own defence) and South Africa to send troops to the war in Africa (Egypt and Kenya); this control is extended eastwards by the Australian Navy (based on Darwin) and other outposts, like Fiji, and Hong Kong, which has strong defences after 5 years as neighbour to a war and having been the 'Gibraltar in the East' before Singapore. The jungle etc. of the Malayan peninsula portrayed as securing the land approaches, the RAF guards the air (C-in-C Far East, Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham). The brief illustrations of all these places and themes often include shots of "native" troops. A confident portrait of readiness for "whatever destiny may have in store."

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Sanger, Gerald: supervisor

Perrin, Raymond: film editor

PRODUCTION CAST:

Mitchell, Leslie: commentary

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/N

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

## LENGTH:

886 ft

## RUNNING TIME:

10 mins

## BLACK &amp; WHITE / COLOUR:

B&amp;W

## SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

## LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

## LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

*Context*

Formed in 1929, the newsreel company British Movietone News was co-owned by its American parent company 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox and by the British newspaper proprietor Lord Rothmere (Low, 2005, 10). This film is one of 25 longer films that the company made for the Ministry of Information during the Second World War (Sanger, 2002, 169). These films were edited by Raymond Perrin and their commentary was provided by Leslie Mitchell, who, in addition to his work for Movietone, is noted for being the first voice heard on both BBC television and ITV. Their 'supervisor' was Gerald Sanger, whom Rothmere had selected to run Movietone News. Langer has stated that these films were translated into several languages and distributed widely, but he nevertheless calls them 'side-lines' and argues that they took 'second place to our chief concern', the bi-weekly newsreel (Sanger, 2002, 169).

*Alert in the East* is centred upon Singapore, and begins with the opening of the port's King George VI dry dock in 1938. Capable of housing the largest vessels, this naval base was hailed as 'The Gibraltar of the East . . . the gateway to the Orient . . . the bastion of British might' (the *Sydney Morning Herald*, cited in Turnbull, 1988, 158). Although constructed in response to the build-up of Japanese naval power in the inter-war years, it was left vulnerable to attack.

During 1941 many British military personnel in the Far East thought that the Japanese had little interest in Singapore; instead, it was felt that their pre-occupation would be the battle against China.

On 1 October 1941, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, Commander-in-Chief of land and air forces, reported that ‘the last thing Japan wants at this juncture is a campaign to the South’ (Turnbull, 1988, 163). British military policy in Singapore was complacent (Churchill believed that the Japanese would not dare to face the might of British naval reinforcements, which it was argued could be mobilised from Europe in time to deal with any crisis) and expedient (with resources stretched, the British decided to prioritise military supplies for Russia, rather than Singapore) (Stockwell, 2001, 474; Turnbull, 1988, 164). Singapore’s wartime economy also affected this situation. The local government, under instruction from Whitehall, gave priority to the production of war supplies, rather than to defence. The Japanese threat was downplayed and local authorities were reluctant to take any action ‘which might shake civilian morale and public confidence’ (Turnbull, 1988, 163).

The first Japanese air attack on Singapore took place on 8 December 1941, corresponding with strikes against Pearl Harbour, Hong Kong and the Philippines. Within 70 days Britain had surrendered the port, an action that Churchill termed ‘the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history’ (Louis, 2001, 26). The Japanese had realised that the British air force in Malaya was under strength and that therefore Singapore was vulnerable to attack from the north. In addition the British had not expected the Japanese to advance via the dense jungle lands of Malaya. The Japanese had also correctly surmised that British propaganda about security in the Far East was ‘deluding only her own people’ (Turnbull, 1988, 165).

As well as being a military disaster, the capitulation of Singapore also affected British standing among the Empire countries. Sir Frederic Eggleston, the Australian Minister in Chungking in May 1942, argued that the British Empire in the Far East had ‘depended on prestige’, adding that ‘This prestige has been completely shattered’ (Jeffrey, 2001, 319).

### *Analysis*

*Alert in the East* is indicative not only of the dangers of British complacency about the security of Singapore but also about the dangers of unfounded propaganda. It is an interesting example of a film that makes claims about events that prove to be unfounded, or fictitious. The meaning of the film’s title soon becomes clear: the viewer is being informed that Britain *is* alert in the East, it is not talking of *an* alert in the east. The first word of the commentary is ‘stronghold’ and we are quickly shown the ‘first class naval and air base at Seletar’.

The opening of the base is presented as being of international importance. We witness the pomp of the formal ceremony and are shown guests from Malaya and the US Navy. Singapore is described as being ‘one of the ramparts of that freedom for which the British Empire stands’.

Correspondingly, the film emphasises international collaboration among the workers in the port. It pays ‘tribute’ to Malay sailors, focussing on their adept handling of boats, and declares that they are ‘born seamen as well as loyal friends of the British Empire’.

The film has two interwoven strands. On the one hand it praises the wartime support of Empire countries, while on the other it argues that it is British power in the Indian Ocean that has secured safety for their lands. Britain is able to rely on the support of India’s ‘magnificent fighting men’ because the sub-continent is ‘undistracted by the worries of self-defence’. Similarly, Australia, Fiji and Hong Kong are all shown to have benefited from the security that Singapore provides. In addition it is argued that British dominance of the Indian Ocean has led to the success of other military campaigns. The bases at Singapore and Aden have ensured the safe passage of Antipodean soldiers, who provided vital support in battles in the Middle East. Throughout the film the mutual protection of Britain and her Empire is stressed. We also witness something of the ‘freedom’ for which the British Empire stands. For example, we learn that ‘guided by British law and order, Fijians are encouraged to progress along the lines of their own customs and culture’.

The film is circular in construction, beginning and ending with Malaya and Singapore. The Malayan jungle is described as providing natural protection for the port: ‘it’s about the thickest in the world, and progress through it would be impossible except by hacking out a path’. The Japanese threat is downplayed to the extent that the country is not even mentioned by name. It is only towards the end that we hear vague mention of a threat, ‘which may arise in the Far East’. Meanwhile, ‘Singapore is well equipped and prepared to deal with anything’. The danger of placing such faith in Singapore is evident in the film’s last line, which talks of the ‘spirit of preparedness and valour which inspires the whole Empire’.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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FILM TITLE:

**the ANGLO-FRENCH AGGRESSION AGAINST EGYPT**

WEB ADDRESS:

<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2511>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1956

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

Egypt

SHORT SUMMARY:

Egyptian film of the Suez Incident.

FULL SUMMARY:

Port Said – tourists, government building programme, increased prosperity following upon Suez Canal nationalisation. Egyptian pilots, working for the nation rather than a "handful of foreign investors", replace the foreign pilots withdrawn by Britain and France in order to obstruct operations and provide an excuse for intervention. Eden and Mollet then begin a "sinister imperialistic conspiracy" with an attack by their cat's paw, Israel, providing a pretext for intervention. Bombing of Ismailiya workshops, Canal bridges and shipping – the interventionists destroy what they claim to protect, threatening world shipping interests and preventing the flow of oil, "industry's life blood", to the West. Residential areas indiscriminately bombed to destroy Egyptian morale, "...but the two war criminals soon realised that their dreams could never come true unless they succeeded in annihilating the twenty-three million people living in this part of Africa." Anglo-French command cuts Port Said water supply. Hospitals "swarming" with civilian victims. But Port Said's heroic resistance dealt "a death blow to barbarism". Egyptian government supports refugees. All Egypt joins in Nasser's prayer for strength and divine aid against the aggressors.

NOTES:

Film: the British answer to this film was a film called THE FACTS ABOUT PORT SAID, held as COI 406, a short-term refutation of the bombing claim, and a second film SUEZ IN

PERSPECTIVE held as COI 340.

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

NON-IWM

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/A

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

1085 ft

RUNNING TIME:

11 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTITLES:

None

### **Context**

*The Anglo-French Aggression Against Egypt* was made by an Egyptian film company during the Suez Crisis of 1956. Egyptian propaganda about the Crisis prompted the British government to respond with three films of their own, *The Facts about Port Said*, *Report from Port Said* and *Suez in Perspective*, all released before the end of 1956.

There were many elements in the build-up to the Suez Crisis. Although Egypt had gained independence from Britain in 1922, the British still maintained a large military presence in the Suez area and, along with France, a concession to operate the Suez Canal. These factors, combined with Britain's role in the formation of the state of Israel in 1948 and continued colonial interests in the Middle East, led to renewed anti-British hostility beginning in the late 1940s (Balfour-Paul, 2001, 508-09). In 1954 President Neguib of Egypt secured an agreement with Britain to withdraw her troops from Suez, and in July 1956 Neguib's successor, President Gamal Abdul Nasser, nationalised the canal.

Nasser was viewed as a destabilising force in the region. His ties with communist countries led to the cancellation of British and American funding for Egypt's Aswan Dam, which in turn was the prompt for Nasser's nationalisation of the Canal (Balfour-Paul, 2001, 509-10). It has been argued that the fragility of his initial rule led him to campaign against British influence in the Middle East,

thus bolstering his power in the region (Barnett, 1992, 82-83). In turn, the British launched a propaganda campaign against Nasser, portraying him as a fanatic dictator and a Soviet 'stooge' (Shaw, 1996, 12). The international community debated how to respond to the nationalisation of the Canal. While Britain, France and Israel contemplated co-ordinated action, the United States, now the most important outside power in the region, would not support the use of force (Hulbert, 2002, 263).

Secretly supported by Britain and France, Israel launched an attack on Egypt on 29 October 1956. Two days later, Britain and France 'intervened', planning to use the Egypt-Israel conflict as justification for their renewed control of the Suez Canal. Nasser responded by blocking the canal with sunken ships, and it was to remain closed until early 1957 (Hulbert, 2002, 269). One of the most controversial aspects of the Anglo-French campaign was the attack upon the city of Port Said. This 'peacekeeping' mission resulted in an estimated 1,000 Egyptian casualties, while in response 23 British and French military personnel were killed (Kyle, 2003, 502-03). In addition, around 900 Egyptians required hospital treatment, in comparison to the 121 injured members of the Anglo-French forces (Kyle, 2003, 503, 641). Although the city was not widely damaged, a block of houses was destroyed by air strikes, the shantytown was burnt down, and the Navy House was blown up (Kyle, 2003, 503).

Tony Shaw claims that Nasser was 'deeply conscious of the power of propaganda' and was also 'one of its most skilful exponents' (Shaw, 1996, 4). This film represents part of the publicising of the attack upon Port Said. Egyptian propaganda, taking the form of 'articles, films, photographs and specially commissioned magazines', was distributed widely, with a particular concentration upon the United States (Shaw, 1996, 179). Most damaging was an article by the Swedish journalist, Olof Perelew Andressen, in which he claimed that British and French troops had killed between 7,000 and 12,000 civilians in Port Said; it is reported that the British government were 'seriously worried' by this campaign (Kyle, 2003, 641). In comparison it has been difficult to find surviving evidence about the impact of this film, or to trace information about its credited makers, 'Egypt Today'. Nevertheless, clear structural echoes of *The Anglo-French Aggression in Egypt* can be seen in *Suez in Perspective* (1957), indicating that the Egyptian film bore some influence on Britain's own propaganda campaign.

The Anglo-French operation drew criticism from all quarters. The United Nations convened for an 'emergency special session' between 1 and 10 November 1956, which established the first United



Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) and called for an immediate ceasefire (United Nations, 1-10 November 1956). The British agreed to these terms, and announced a ceasefire on 6 November 1956, while troops were still on operational manoeuvres in Port Said. In December 1956 British and French troops were withdrawn from the city and replaced by Danish and Colombian units of the UNEF.

### **Analysis**

*The Anglo-Aggression Against Egypt* was compiled and distributed quickly. It appears to have been made in the period between the Anglo-French advance on Port Said, which began on 5 November 1956, and the British government's decision to make an 'answer' film, addressing Egyptian propaganda about the crisis, which was announced 16 December 1956 (Hulbert, 2002, 275). Despite the speed with which it was made, it is a cleverly constructed film. It aims to influence international opinion about the actions of the British and the French; its most immediately notable feature being its English-language script spoken in an English accent.

The film begins with images of a harmonious international and multi-faith community enjoying the 'charm' of Port Said, a city that is taking 'long strides ahead'. These scenes serve two purposes. First, to underline what the British and French have destroyed (the film goes on to show extended scenes of the damage wrought upon Port Said). Secondly, to counter British propaganda about the despotism of Nasser. A notable aspect of the film is the absence of Egypt's supposedly autocratic leader: he is only mentioned at its conclusion, when the commentator quotes one of his speeches. Instead the film's stress is upon the Egyptian people as a whole. It talks of their 'independence' and their 'unshakable determination'. It claims that that the 'dreams' of Britain and France could 'never come true unless they succeeded in annihilating the 23 million people living in this part of Africa'. The Egyptian people are also shown to be co-operative: the images of Port Said are followed by images of the effectively working, nationalised Suez Canal. Scenes that again stress collaborative independence, and which prefigure what will later be destroyed.

In contrast, the leaders of Britain and France are described as 'imperialistic' and 'treacherous'; they are 'war criminals', men who destroy what they claim to protect. Moreover, despite the fact that it would be 1967 before a British politician admitted to collusion between Britain, France and Israel (Beck, 2009, 608), this film makes direct claims about the machinations of the three countries. It refers to their 'secret arrangements' and the 'sinister imperialistic conspiracy'.

The film does not include any footage of the Israeli advance. Instead, it relies on stock images of explosions and cannon fire to convey the attack, while the soundtrack features overdubbed explosions and the commentator talks of bombs ‘dropped indiscriminately’. The film distorts information. It claims that it was the British and French who sank boats in the Canal, and by showing extended, multiple images of the ‘Anglo-French horrors’ in Port Said, it makes it look like a city in ruins. The Anglo-French advance is also not shown. However, the film makes up for this with talk of ‘civilian victims machine-gunned in the streets by the ruthless aggressors’. Despite its deliberate emphases, the footage of the destruction of Port Said and the city’s casualties does appear to be genuine.

The film’s most interesting sleight of hand is to portray the Anglo-French advance as a ‘live’ situation. It concludes with images of refugees from Port Said, overlaid with Nasser’s message that ‘the ordeal through which the world is passing at *present* is the responsibility of the aggressors who invaded Egypt. [...] We will never give in’. And yet the film must have been made with some knowledge of the British ceasefire, which came on the day following the initial advance. The film does not mention the end of Anglo-French hostilities – doing so would have weakened the stress laid upon their ‘aggression’ – nor does it mention the intervention of the United Nations, which would have similarly affected the portrayal of Egyptian independence.

**Richard Osborne (May 2010)**

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Title:

**ANNUAL INSPECTION OF THE BODYGUARD BY HIS EXCELLENCY LORD  
LYTTON**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4584>

Title Ref:

Director:

Prod. Country: GB

Year: 1925

Production Company:

Release Date: 1925

Format: 35

Length: 281 Feet 86 Metres

Colour Code: B

Sound System: SLNT

*Synopsis*

ACTUALITY. The Governor of Bengal, Lord Lytton, inspects the Governor's Bodyguard in Calcutta.

Main title. The Governor and his party get out of a car at the inspection ground, a wide expanse of grass and trees (30). Lord Lytton mounts a horse by means of some portable steps. He and two other men, all in military uniform and wearing pith helmets, ride past the Bodyguard, also on horseback in two lines (93). Lytton talks to Lady Lytton and Hermione Lytton, both elegantly attired and standing in front of easy chairs set on a rug placed on the grass, with potted plants and a dog sitting in front of one of the chairs. Lytton chats to Hermione(?), who wears a large fox fur draped round her neck (143). The Bodyguard, on horseback, trots past the Governor, in a wide line (154). They trot past again, in two lines (170). Pan of the Lytton party, including two young girls, aged about 6 and 8 (187). More trotting past in formation (210). An Indian officer, wearing uniform and a turban, holds a medal on a cushion, which Lytton takes and pins it on the uniform of one of the Bodyguard (225). MCU Hermione Lytton and Lady Lytton, who holds the dog and they wave the dog's paws at the camera (262). Longer shot of the party chatting (279) 'FINIS' (280ft).

### *Context*

Victor Bulwer-Lytton, the second Earl of Lytton, was Governor of Bengal from 1922-27. His time in office was recalled in his autobiography, *Pundits and Elephants*, where he speaks confidently of oriental characteristics and is convinced of the Indian's difference from the Englishman. He states that 'there are certain features which broadly differentiate Orientals from those who in India are called "Europeans"' (Lytton, 1942, 1). Moreover, he argues that Indians and Europeans should retain this difference: 'On the whole, the best rule for an Englishman when dealing with Indians is never to be other than English and not to expect an Indian to be other than Indian, and *vice versa* the same rule applies to the Indian when dealing with the English' (Lytton, 1942, 4-5).

Politics in India during the mid-1920s have sometimes been regarded as a period of stagnation; the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, even talked of them being 'in suspense' (Brown, 1994, 231). This was not the case in Bengal, however. Here Lord Irwin had tried to implement the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, which allowed for a degree of Indian rule in local government. Nevertheless, having invited the nationalist leader C. R. Das to become a minister, Das and his party refused to vote on the budget, with the result that Lytton suspended the reforms and governed without ministers for three years (Tomes). The most serious threat that Lytton faced during this period came from a resurgence of terrorism in Bengal. This concerted campaign involved attempts to murder the Police Commissioner and to blow up Lytton's train (Lytton, 1942, 6). Consequently, Lytton campaigned for the instatement of emergency powers in Bengal. These were granted in late 1924, leading to the imprisonment of over 50 nationalist leaders, including Subhas Chandra Bose (*The Times*, 29 October 1924, 15).

Lytton did not particularly enjoy his period in office. He wrote that 'Had I known then what I came to know later – that the discontented Indian Nationalists, whom I hoped to win by sympathy, did not want a sympathetic Government, but either a Government of their own making or one which they could abuse as tyrannical – I would never have gone to India' (Lytton, 1942, 9). He also complained about the climate and its effects on his family's health; about the lack of intellectual life in India; and about the level of entertaining he had to do (Lytton, 1942, 10-11). Lytton believed that during the 1920s Indians still lacked the ability for self-rule – 'Politicians claimed that the people were ready to govern the whole of India, though they had never even tried to govern a village' – his one positive achievement, he felt, was to 'sow the seeds of a spirit of self-help' (Lytton, 1942, 12). His critics argued that during his period in office he 'spent too much time at Darjeeling [one of the hill towns that provided a retreat for British officials], pondering on the glory, mischief, and pity of it

all' (Tomes).

The actuality *Annual Inspection of the Bodyguard by His Excellency the Lord Lytton* was shot in 1925. Although produced by a British company, this film also constituted part of a 'Calcutta Topical', released in 1926 by the Indian company, Madan Theatres, which was at this time the largest distribution chain in India (Rajadhyaksha, 1986, 51). Madan Theatres was responsible for the first Bengali feature film *Billwamangal* (1919), the first Bengali talking picture *Jamai Shashbi* (1931), and was also the largest importer of films into the country (Sharma, 2004). During the silent era many of the leading Indian studios produced 'topicals', short films featuring recent events, which would be shown as an added attraction to the main feature film (Gautaman, 1996; Garga, 2007, 40). Although these companies documented some of the nationalist political events that were happening in India, their topicals were also preoccupied with 'Social engagements, royal visits and arrivals and departures of the governors and viceroys' (Garga, 2007, 40). Madan Theatres' Calcutta series aimed to show 'all the leading events of the season' (Baker, 2009).

### *Analysis*

Certain elements of this film support statements that Lord Lytton made about his time in India, while others negate them. On the one hand, reflecting the unhappiness of his period in charge, Lytton does not look particularly healthy (he is painfully thin) nor does he look particularly comfortable with his role (there is awkwardness in his inspection of the guard: he requires steps and the help of three Indian soldiers in order to mount his small horse, and he makes an uneasy gesture once he is underway). On the other hand, the film contains no evidence of his purported belief in 'self-help'. On the contrary, Indians are throughout witnessed in a subservient role. A young boy opens the door of Lytton's car for him and, more obviously, the performance of the Bodyguard is in his honour. It would be unwise to read too much into this short film, however. It depicts a formal military inspection and does not appear to have been made to serve any political or propaganda purposes in respect of Lytton. Although it is tempting to regard Lytton's Bodyguard as being a necessity, the disturbances of the previous year do not impinge upon the film. Moreover, it would be inapt to single out Lord Lytton for critique, his demeanour being better indicative of colonial authority in general.

Nevertheless, there is one element of the film that clearly mirrors Lytton's beliefs: he and his family are never seen as being anything 'other than English'. This is reflected most clearly in the clothes they wear. While the Indians in the film wear either uniform or traditional clothing, Lytton and his

family sport up-to-date English fashions. This attire forms one of the main subjects of the film. The camerawork reveals the full elegance of Lytton's frock coat, cane and spats, and of his wife's fox fur and cloche hat. Although this clothing reflects a separateness from Indian life, it should not be forgotten that this film was shown to an Indian audience, who were presumably interested in the fashion items that are on display.

The majority of this film is shot in a fairly straightforward manner; scenes are usually taken from a single camera position. Nevertheless, the positioning of the camera always serves to reinforce Lytton's authority, and by extension, that of the colonial power. The camera focuses primarily on him and his family. For example, during the inspection of the guard Lord Lytton is repeatedly framed in the centre of the screen even if this means that the lines of troops are cropped. The film features a section in which the Bodyguard canters past Lytton and his party. This part is cut so that it alternates between images of Lytton and point-of-view shots. Although such shots provide greater detail of the Bodyguard than we have previously seen, we still retain an awareness of Lytton's presence: they are shot from the position that he occupies at the parade ground.

**Richard Osborne (June 2009)**

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CIN 203

FILM NUMBER

FILM TITLE:

**ARMS FROM INDIA**

TOOLS FOR THE JOB [alternative]

WEB ADDRESS:

<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5752>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1941

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

India

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Film Advisory Board of India

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Indian Film Unit

SHORT SUMMARY:

A survey of the involvement of India's Home Front in the war effort.

FULL SUMMARY:

An opening sequence of blackout, ARP practice and maps showing India's far-flung strategic frontiers (Egypt to Singapore) suggests the sort of involvement that could threaten in the future. The main sequence shows India's war industry at work backing up India's and the Commonwealth fighting forces to avert such a threat: 'These men and women also fight: they fight the battle of the factories'. Film shows production of gun parts and munitions, tyres, assembly of Indian-made vehicle bodies on US chassis imports, textile industries (cotton, wool and canvas) and medical supplies. A still wider variety of products is suggested with film of trains loading, shipyards etc. Other forms of support are mentioned: Princes' donations, 'war weeks.' A final sequence, of Indian servicemen, countryside and workers, accompanies final commentary on India's determination "to preserve her ancient, tranquil civilisation."

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Mir, Ezra: director

[Farrukhi, Sherroz]: [director]

Shaw, Alexander: producer

Date, V V: cameraman

Mevavalla, N D: film editor



Wadia Movietone: music

Gibson, R V: commentary

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/16/A

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

373 ft

RUNNING TIME:

10 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTTLES:

None

**Context**

In July 1940, the Film Advisory Board (FAB) was constituted to oversee the production of propaganda films in India. Organised by the Government of India, the FAB was comprised primarily of leading figures in the Indian film industry. The production of films was partly funded by the British government's Ministry of Information (MoI), who therefore had a say in the appointment of staff (Woods, 2001, 297). Disappointed with the quality of early FAB films, the MoI suggested that a British documentary expert should supervise production (Garga, 2007, 66-67). Alexander Shaw, a filmmaker of some standing, was duly selected and arrived in India in late 1940.

Shaw resigned after only 10 months in the post, claiming that this was 'partly on personal grounds, partly because he was not accepted by the Indian industry' (Garga, 2007, 80). His appointment had

been widely criticised in the Indian movie press, and Shaw further believed that the Indian members of the FAB had wanted his efforts to fail (Garga, 2007, 69-70; Woods, 2001, 301). B.D. Garga argues that 'Shaw was the right man for the job but had arrived at the wrong time' (Garga, 2007, 70-71). His term in India coincided with a period of nationalist civil disobedience. Shaw had wanted to make films that addressed the political situation, but found little desire on anybody's part for films by a British expert about the situation.

Shaw produced 13 original documentary films while in India, a high proportion of which address the War. The remit of *Arms From India*, originally titled *Tools for the Job*, is outlined in a pamphlet documenting the FAB's films: 'A brief yet comprehensive survey of India's War Production is the motif of this documentary which concentrates on the manufacture of some of the lesser known War materials not covered by other films' (*IFI: A Brief Review of I.F.I. Releases*, 1944, 29). During the War, all mill production of textiles, all factory production of leather and footwear, approximately three-quarters of steel output and over two-fifths of paper production in India were destined for the War effort, and by 1943 India was third only to Britain and Canada in producing goods for the Allied cause (Jackson, 2006, 358). This film also details India's voluntary contributions to the War effort, both monetarily and in terms of military personnel. Despite the opposition of Indian nationalists to the War cause, the number of Indian recruits expanded rapidly: for example Army numbers rose from around 200,000 men in 1939 to around 900,000 by the end of 1941 (Jackson, 2006, 363).

Shaw wished to introduce more Indian personnel into the FAB (Woods, 2001, 294). This film was directed by Ezra Mir, described by Shaw as 'an old hand at the film game' (Garga, 2007, 73). Mir was a veteran of the Indian film industry, and he would later head Information Films of India, the successor to the FAB. In India, the FAB films were dubbed into several languages, and were circulated to the country's 200 English-language cinemas and 1,000 Indian-language cinemas. They were also distributed, via mobile cinema vans, to the vast rural population who provided the main source of military recruits (Woods, 2001, 299).

Shaw's remit was complicated by the differing aims of the Government of India and the MoI. The former body was chiefly concerned with the reception of the FAB's films in India, whereas the MoI was interested in their reception beyond the sub-continent (Woods, 2001, 298-99). The MoI desired that the films be shown in Britain, in other Empire countries, and also in the USA. These separate markets required different opinions on how both the War and Britain's attitude towards India should be portrayed. It was believed that audiences in Britain did not wish to see films that depicted

the War being fought for an imperialist cause, 'since a fairly large body of opinion in Britain cares little for the continued existence of the empire' (Haggith, 1998, 76). R.R. Ford, film adviser for the British Library of Information in New York, suggested that, for the USA, the films should depict India 'as the arsenal of the East, but avoiding the impression that Indians have been conscripted to work like slaves for British interests' (Garga, 2007, 77-78). In the USA and Britain the Shaw-era FAB films were usually only accorded a non-theatrical release. Nevertheless, according to MoI figures, *Arms From India* had been shown to 210,000 people in Britain by March 1943 (Leach, 22 March 1943). The MoI also remarked upon the improved standard of FAB's films compared with earlier productions (Leach, 22 March 1943).

### Analysis

Three main themes regularly surface in propaganda films made in India during the early years of the Second World War: the danger of an attack by the Axis powers; the importance of devoting India's industry towards the War effort; and the need to get more Indians to volunteer. This film is comprehensive in that it covers all three strands. It is also skilfully constructed, most of its scenes build upon one another, and there is stylistic balance (for example, there is a recurrence of people filmed using side lighting). Nevertheless, *Arms From India* covers too many themes and addresses too many audiences for it to be able to maintain an overall sense of coherence.

The film begins by depicting Indians drawing blinds and extinguishing lights for the wartime blackout. Here we can see the advances of this film upon earlier FAB productions. The filmmakers make dramatic use of darkness and light to underline their message, and they are also careful to couch the blackout in appropriate terms: India's cities are described as going into 'purdah' at night. As well as being instructional, the blackout theme is employed as a means of illustrating the imminent possibility of an enemy attack, something that is then elaborated upon. By means of maps and footage of British and Indian military personnel, India's strategic position is outlined, as is the need for the country's vigilance. Here a parallel is drawn with the situation in Europe: 'Sirens: England laughed at them until 1940'.

Having outlined the danger, the filmmakers are well placed to discuss the need and value of Indian support. The film now turns to its main theme: India's industrial contribution to the War. It is here, however, that it begins to be pulled in different directions. In part, the film is clearly aimed at Indians; here it offers an alternative to John Milton's 'They also serve who only stand and wait', instead maintaining that 'with thread and bodkin these men and women also fight'. This boosting of

the activities of the Indians who are producing War goods is accompanied by a stress that what they are producing is destined for India's own troops: a roll call of goods is described and depicted; the viewer is then informed that they are being 'loaded for Indian troops overseas'. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that this film was retitled *Arms From India*, and this section also appears to have been constructed with a British audience in mind, as such it outlines the fact that out of the '40,000 items on the Ordnance shopping list, more than half are made in India'.

Similarly, the following section on the wartime support of Indians appears to be aimed at both Indian and British audiences. One of its purposes is to encourage Indians to recruit. Its most notable sequence features footage of a lone soldier, who is filmed from the neck down only. While he is being filmed the voiceover talks of recruits being drawn from all of India's religions, and the decision not to disclose the soldier's face the film encourages Indian viewers from all backgrounds to think that they could be the person to fulfil this role. Surrounding this sequence, there is an emphasis on the loyal support of Indians: mention is made of the donations made by Indian Princes, and we hear of the 'hundreds of thousands' who have volunteered for the Army. While aiming to encourage further support from Indians, these scenes also appear to be addressed to a British audience, reassuring them of the loyalty of the sub-continent.

The film closes as it began: stressing the imminent danger of an Axis attack. It also introduces a new theme here and becomes more openly contradictory. It is argued that, although India 'excels in the arts of peace', the country needs to go to war so that it can thwart the 'barbaric ideals of the enemy'. We are told that the Axis powers would wish to disrupt India's 'ancient, tranquil civilisation', which is depicted via the film's first images of rural India. The film now talks of a 'baffling material age' that the Axis powers would wish to usher in. However, it is hard to forget that we had previously been shown modern methods of manufacture developed in India, 'eighth industrial country of the world', and that these had been developed for Allied rather than Axis ends; the film had also boasted about these wartime developments being 'a symbol of India's industrial progress'. In an attempt to reach out to those who would wish to preserve the traditions of India as well as to those who would wish to see the country progress, the film is not successful in reconciling its aims. Moreover, it should be considered just whom the film is trying to address here. It is possible that it is aiming to win over different parties in India, but it is also possible that it is addressing an American audience, aiming to illustrate the diverse ways in which Britain protected the interests of its colony.

**Richard Osborne (July 2010)**

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FILM TITLE:

**BASSEIN: AN INDIAN FISHING VILLAGE**

WEB ADDRESS:

<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5755>

PRODUCTION DATE:

7/5/1946

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

India

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Central Office of Information

Government of India

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Information Films of India

SHORT SUMMARY:

Short documentary about Bassein, a fishing village 25 miles north of Bombay on the shores of the Arabian Sea.

FULL SUMMARY:

The film shows the family of a fisherman, one who owns his own boat. After he has set out for the day the camera observes village activities – the women collecting wood and drying fish, the children operating the village spinning-machine, and an old man using the thread to mend nets. A boat is overhauled and repainted. A Portuguese ruin, "a monument to past glories", provides a stone well which is still used by the natives. The villagers also retain the religion of the Portuguese, and they are seen at prayer – the wife prays for the safety of her husband at sea. The scene then shifts to the fishing boats, where the nets are hauled in and the return voyage begun with the turning of the tide. Once ashore, the fish are dressed, and bargains struck with the merchants who come to buy the catch. The fish are then loaded onto trucks for shipment to the Bombay market. With the day's work over, the fishermen relax. End shot, sunlit sea.

NOTES:

Remarks: a very idyllic portrait of village life. However, the appearance of the merchants strikes a rather discordant note, which might indicate that the real situation is closer to that depicted in COI 615 (qv).

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Gopal, Krishna: director

Gopal, Krishna: photography

Menon, Narayana (Dr): music composer

Easdale, Brian: music composer

Cameron, Ken: sound recordist

Camp, Alex: film editor (cutter)

PRODUCTION CAST:

Madden, Peter: commentator

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

F 1/35/N

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

871 ft

RUNNING TIME:

10 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTITLES:

None

*Context*

*Bassein: An Indian Fishing Village*, a documentary shot towards the end of British rule in India, harks back to the beginnings of European colonisation of the sub-continent. Bassein is located on the western coast of India in the stretch that was first colonised by the Portuguese in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The film features one of the forts that the Portuguese built to protect their trading interests in the area. It also takes note of the Catholic religion still practised by the villagers, a remnant of this first period of European influence.

The film was released in 1946, the year before Indian independence. It was one of the last films produced by the Government of India body, Information Films of India (IFI). IFI had assumed responsibility for propaganda films in 1943 in response to two main threats: the growing seriousness of the war in South-East Asia, and the unrest in the sub-continent caused by the nationalist Quit India movement (Garga, 2007, 97). Its aims were furthered by the Defence of India Rule 44A, effective from September 1943, which required that every cinema in India show at least 2000 feet of Government 'approved' film at each performance.

Despite its political motivations, the IFI made some positive contributions to Indian filmmaking. Alex Shaw, the British film director and producer, had been executive producer at its independent forerunner, the Film Advisory Board. In contrast, the IFI was headed by Ezra Mir, an Indian filmmaker. Alongside the war propaganda films, Mir encouraged the production of documentaries that would depict aspects of Indian culture and industry. It was his belief that as Indians approached independence they needed to be made aware of their heritage and of their arts (Garga, 2007, 108-09). While IFI's military films had been shunned by both audiences and critics, Mir's documentaries of national life gained greater popularity and acclaim (Garga, 2007, 110-11; Holmes, 1946, 44).

The constitution of IFI began to reflect these national interests. Winifred Holmes, who worked for the organisation during 1945, noted that IFI 'became more and more all-Indian during its years of growth, until when I worked in it last year, all but three of the production and administrative staff were Indian' (Holmes, 1946, 43). *Bassein: An Indian Fishing Village* is nevertheless a combined Anglo-Indian production. The film was directed by the Bombay-native Krishna Gopal, while the sound recording and commentary were handled by British employees, Ken Cameron and Peter Madden. The music for the documentary was shared between Indian and British composers. The film was also shown in both countries. The British journal *Monthly Film Bulletin* reviewed *Bassein: An Indian Fishing Village*, stating that it is 'a pleasant and interesting film' that 'would be of interest to Geographical societies' (MFB, 1947, 147).

The British government had been keen to see the work of IFI continue after the war. However, despite the changed emphasis in its filmmaking, IFI remained unpopular with the independence movement; its image tainted by its association with Britain's military aims. The interim post-war Indian government, dominated by nationalist leaders, brought an end to IFI. They cut its funding and withdrew the Defence of India Rule 44A (Garga, 2007, 114-15).



### *Analysis*

B.D. Garga has praised the documentaries of IFI for helping to make an Indian audience 'aware of their own country'; however, he also points out that 'Because of limitations, these films were neither comprehensive nor analytical' (Garga, 2007, 115, 114). This latter statement is certainly true of *Bassein: An Indian Fishing Village*. The film has two main subjects: the fishing industry of the village, and its colonial past and future. Neither is investigated in detail.

The fishing trade provides the main subject of the film. Here we get to see some of the old traditions. The fisherman who owns his boat is entitled to wear a silver belt, and we learn of the folk songs that the crew sing at the end of their day's work. We also learn about the division of labour. While the fishermen are out at sea their wives dry the previous day's catch and fetch firewood. Meanwhile, the children make and mend nets using 'the only machine in the village'. Nevertheless, despite the presence of Bombay traders towards the end of the film, the profitability and future prospects of the fishing industry are never outlined.

What we see instead is an idyllic portrait of village life. The sea is shown as beautifully glistening water and the fishing work is portrayed as being a harmonious co-enterprise. The film focuses on one particular family: a fisherman, his wife and their daughter. They come across as being the most compatible family on earth, and we repeatedly get to view their adoration for one another.

By emphasising this pastoral bliss the film puts on show a life and a love that will outlast changes in power. But it is the film's portrayal of colonial history that is its most interesting aspect. In a film shot towards toward the end of the British Empire we get a depiction of Portuguese colonisation in ruins. The women of the village go to collect water from a well in the neighbouring abandoned fort. We are informed of former Portuguese rule and learn that during their occupation their traders 'grew rich and powerful'. The film then grows curiously melancholy as it depicts the ruins and talks of the fact that as Portuguese 'power waned [...] their buildings were left to decay in India's encroaching jungle'. This segment closes with an image of a Portuguese grave, 'a monument to past glories'. The shadow of one of the Indians then falls across it and they raise their hat in honour.

No mention is made of British colonisation. Instead there is a cut to a lively scene of the Indian women fetching water. We are informed that 'the wells remained' and that, by implication, life went on. Later in the film there is a scene of young children playing with toy boats; another image that

speaks of continuing traditions. Nevertheless, the film also admits that some of these traditions have been inherited from colonial rule. We learn that the Portuguese left behind their Christian religion; at this point there is a depiction of the doting wife praying at her altar for her husband's safe return.

In its portrayal of colonisation this film's lack of analysis can actually be considered a strength. *Bassein: An Indian Fishing Village* is quietly eloquent about both the transience and the lasting effects of colonial rule.

**Richard Osborne (September 2009)**

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CBE 206

FILM NUMBER

FILM TITLE:

**the BATTLE FOR FREEDOM**

WEB ADDRESS:

<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5727>

PRODUCTION DATE:

9/1942

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Ministry of Information

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Strand

SHORT SUMMARY:

The world in the third year of war - a mixture of caution ("Today our world faces its greatest danger") and determination ("Preparing for the attack which must come").

FULL SUMMARY:

Film stresses the global nature of the war, and the Commonwealth's importance, both geographically and as participants. Opening sequence shows Axis leaders and troops, followed by shots of Commonwealth agriculture etc. (as Axis goals) - also Axis 'Civilisation' (film of Abyssinian war) contrasted with Commonwealth schemes of education, eventual self-government etc. Remainder of 1st reel is a tour of Commonwealth Home Fronts showing troop training, agriculture and industry in South Africa, Australia, Canada, India; also mention of Jamaican Spitfire fund, Canadian Commonwealth Air Training scheme and neutrality of Eire. Reel 2 speaks of various battle areas with suitable film – Russian front, RAF bombing, Atlantic, China: also film of troops training in Australia, India and Great Britain.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Osborn, Alan: director

Wright, Basil: producer

Osborn, Alan: film editor

Burbeck, Edith: assistant film editor

Alwyn, William: music composer

King, Harold: sound recordist

Thomas, Dylan: commentary written

PRODUCTION CAST:

Stevenson, Kent: commentary spoken

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

LPU

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/N

NUMBER OF REELS:

2

LENGTH:

1241 ft

RUNNING TIME:

14 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTTLES:

None

**Context**

The Strand Film Company issued *The Battle for Freedom* in September 1942. Strand had first entered into commercial documentary production in 1935, employing several people who had been involved with the GPO Film Unit, including the head of the company, Donald Taylor; the original director of production, Paul Rotha; and Basil Wright, who produced this film. During the War, Strand was the largest and one of the most productive documentary companies making films under contract for the Ministry of Information (Ackerman, 1995, xi). Some of their films would have been viewed in Britain under the 'five-minute' and 'fifteen-minute' film schemes, whereby a portion of each cinema programme was devoted to MoI material (Swann, 1989, 154). Swann notes that these films were 'not generally well received by audiences' (Swann, 1989, 166). Meanwhile, under a separate scheme, 115

mobile film display units were utilised to show MoI films around Britain (Swann, 1989, 155).

William Farr has suggested that these displays reached approximately 2,250,000 regular viewers during 1942-43 (Swann, 1989, 189). Provisions were also made for the distribution of these films overseas (Swann, 1989, 160).

*The Battle for Freedom* has a distinguished list of contributors. Although Basil Wright was originally commissioned to write the commentary, the final version was completed by Dylan Thomas, who worked on at least ten Strand/MoI documentaries during the War ('Battle for Freedom'; Berry, 1984, 185); it is directed and edited by Alan Osbiston, who later won an Academy Award for his work on *The Guns of Navarone* (1961); and it is narrated by the BBC war correspondent Kent Stevenson, who was killed while reporting on a raid over Germany in June 1944 ('Broadcasting House Memorial').

The film is concerned with the threat of the Axis powers in the War and with the response of the Empire and Dominion countries. Originally conceived in 1941, and first titled 'Heartbeat of an Empire', the focus of this film changed along with altered circumstances in the War ('Battle for Freedom'). In the latter half of 1942 the Axis forces were at their furthest reach. German and Italian troops controlled most of Europe and were advancing in Russia, meanwhile Japan had occupied all of Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Singapore and most of Burma.

Most of the British Dominions had been quick to provide support during the War, with only Ireland adopting a neutral stance (Jeffery, 2001, 307-09). In the Empire countries there was a more varied response. It has been calculated that in Africa as a whole, some 374,000 men were recruited into the armed forces during the War (Jeffery, 2001, 311-12), while some countries, such as Nigeria, introduced voluntary funding schemes. India, on the other hand, 'was the centre of the most serious resistance to the British war effort found anywhere in the Empire' (Jackson, 2006, 381). Here members of the Indian National Congress resigned from government rather than support the War effort. They also rejected the offer made by Sir Stafford Cripps in March 1942, which promised Dominion status for India in return for co-operation during the War, instead embarking upon the open rebellion of the 'Quit India' movement. Nevertheless, there was also support for the War within India. Indians volunteered at the rate of 50,000 a month, and the Indian army grew quickly from about 200,000 men in 1939 to 900,000 by the end of 1941 (Jackson, 2006, 358).

The Second World War diversely affected the status of the British Empire. Keith Jeffery notes that it was only during this conflict that ‘the Empire approach[ed] the otherwise mythical status of a formidable, efficient, and effective power system, prepared to exploit its apparently limitless resources, and actually able to deploy forces throughout the world’ (Jeffery, 2001, 306). Conversely, the War helped to signal the Empire’s end. The British campaign was undertaken as a crusade for freedom and democracy against the forces of fascism, and the fall of Singapore in February 1942 prompted a new wave of propaganda, promoting the idea of ‘partnership’ and ‘colonial development’ with the aim of securing colonial support (Jeffery, 2001, 313). Ultimately, such promises helped to lead the British towards the promise of self-government for colonial countries: Jeffrey claims that ‘the ultimate cost of defending the British Empire during the Second World War was the Empire itself’ (Jeffery, 2001, 327).

### **Analysis**

*The Battle for Freedom* is not regarded as being one of the more distinguished films that Dylan Thomas worked on during the War. It is compiled from existing footage derived from newsreels, the War Office, the governments of Canada, New Zealand and Australia, and ‘other sources’ (‘Battle for Freedom’); in David Berry’s opinion the film ‘smacked of a dutiful assignment and aroused no great critical interest’ (Berry, 1994, 189). The film is nevertheless a worthy object of study. Despite the fact that it is not Thomas’s best work, it does provide evidence of his descriptive skills. He is particularly effective at articulating the menace of the Axis forces, which ‘threaten more dangerously each moment of the dark, dangerous day that is war’. Moreover, the film and the language that Thomas employs are of interest because of what they reveal about the British Empire and the War at a particular period in time.

This period is made clear in the opening line of commentary: ‘The third year of the second world war and loud and savage from their recent victories, the Axis powers are now grimly confident that world domination lies within their clutch’. The film then enumerates the triumphs of the Axis partners: ‘Germany has conquered Europe’; ‘Italy obeys, stabs and betrays’; ‘Japan has torn away the islands of the Far East’. The overt aim of the film is to encourage the mutual support of Britain and the Empire countries in the ‘battle for freedom’ that is the Second World War. In doing so it emphasises the gravity of the situation: Empire countries are described as being ‘ripe for the picking’; there is talk of ‘the living death of slavery under fascism’. The film also stresses the level of the support that is being provided by these countries: the portrayal of the aid that is being given is morale boosting for audiences both at home and abroad.

The filmmakers use the Axis advance to tell an additional story: it provides them with the opportunity to portray the British Empire in the most positive light. The film begins by outlining a series of opposites. Images of destruction, military aggression, and regimented obedience are used to demonstrate what life would be like under an Axis Empire, and the commentary talks of the rule of 'bayonet and gas bomb'. In contrast, to illustrate life in the British Empire countries, we see footage of schools, hospitals and laboratories in which the local people are given positions of authority. Here the commentary talks of 'weapons of science to fight against disease and suffering'. It is argued that Axis rule will lead towards 'drugged' and 'chained' slavery, while British rule will lead towards 'full independence and self-government'.

The film is fulfilling several propaganda purposes here. As it informs the people of the colonies that 'they shall achieve that freedom and independence already known by the great peoples of the Dominions' a second meaning to the film's title is introduced: the people are being told that, if they join the battle for freedom against the Axis countries, they will also ensure the battle for freedom in their own lands. This message of independence is also presumably directed towards American allies, amongst whom the British government wished to convey an image of 'constructive imperialism' (Jeffery, 2001, 325). The film is also looking towards a British Commonwealth, rather than a British Empire, and in outlining the resources of these countries as well as the willing support of their peoples, it is demonstrating to all partners the present and future benefits of this arrangement.

The second half of the film covers the wartime contributions of various Empire and Dominion countries. The most interesting of these portrayals is of India. Unlike several other British or Indian governmental films of this period, *The Battle for Freedom* is open about the Indian political situation: the portrait begins by acknowledging the 'refusal of the Cripps proposals'. It nevertheless quickly turns to a positive outlining of Indian support. On screen there are images of Indian military volunteers; meanwhile the commentary reinforces the film's message of freedom through battle: the film's various audiences are informed that 'a successful Japanese invasion would mean slavery, would mean that the certainty of the British promise of India's independence would vanish like smoke'.

**Richard Osborne (June 2010)**

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**BIKANER**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1774>  
 Title Ref: Sift 12921  
 Series Title: SECRETS OF INDIA  
 Part No: 5  
 Director:  
 Prod. Country : GB  
 Year: 1934  
 1st Release: 1934  
 Prodn. Company: Gaumont-British Instructional  
 Release Country: GB  
 Format: 35  
 Run Time (Mins): 10  
 Length: 733 Feet 223 Metres  
 Colour Code: B  
 Colour System:  
 Sound System: SOUN  
 Language: ENG  
 Dubbed: N  
 Subtitled: N  
 Credit  
 Production Company Gaumont-British Instructional  
 Supervisor CONS, G.J.  
 Photography VEEVERS, V. (C)

*Synopsis*

INSTRUCTIONAL. Opening shot of a map of India. An arrow indicates the Deccan States and then the Rajputana States and Thar desert where the town of Bikaner is situated. Bullock carts and camels make their way across the desert to Bikaner. A map shows how the town is protected by walls from the desert sands. Shots of the walls from outside and inside the city. At the gates of the town, traffic is continually coming and going – bullock carts, camels, motor cars, bicycles. A sacred cow crosses the road. Shots of Hindus worshipping in the courtyard of the temple. The Indian schoolchildren are shown sitting on the ground doing their lessons on slates. A snake charmer and an animal imitator perform in the street (365). Water is obtained from wells outside the town. The

water is pulled up in large leather bags by ropes attached to oxen. It is then poured into a stone channel that carries it to the town. Outside the town is the palace belonging to the Maharajah of Bikaner. The Maharajah drives in procession through Bikaner (733ft).

### *Context*

The film *Bikaner* formed part of the 'Secrets of India' series, produced by the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in 1934. These films were the by-product of the company's involvement in a filmed flight over Mount Everest, footage of which appeared as *Wings Over Everest* (1934) (Low, 2005, 61). Among the crew were the cameraman S. R. Bonnett and V. Veevers, who were also responsible for filming the *Secrets of India* shorts. Some of the films in this series were assigned to the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation while others, such as *Bikaner*, appeared under the Gaumont-British Instructional division, which specialised in producing documentaries for the educational market. *Bikaner* was one of the films for which V. Veevers was responsible, receiving 'supervision' from G. J. Jons, who was then head of the Geography Department at Goldsmiths College.

Bikaner is a city situated in the Thar Desert, now in the state of the Rajasthan. It was formerly the capital of the Princely State of the same name, and was founded by the Rajput prince Rao Bika in the fifteenth century ('History of Bikaner'). Known as the 'Green City', Bikaner has been defined by its relationship with water. Its location in the barren desert provided its rulers with a safe haven, protecting them from having to pay tribute to more formidable Marathas (Ramusack, 2004, 23). Drought has been a common occurrence, however, with a severe famine occurring in 1899-1900.

The ruling prince at the time that this documentary was made was Ganga Singh. His long period as ruler, lasting from 1898 to 1942, witnessed many advances. He oversaw the construction of the Ganga canal, which brought water to his rain deficient state. He also introduced a number of welfare schemes; developed hospitals and schools; introduced the first Chief Court in Rajasthan; and created a Representative Legislative Assembly for his state. Ganga Singh was one of the most politically active of the Indian Princes. He was the first chairman of the Chamber of Princes, a body formed in 1921 to discuss issues of princely concern. He was also one of the principal spokesmen at the Lord Irwin's Round Table Conference of 1931, during which the princes proposed the formation of a Federation between the Princely States and British India as a solution to the constitutional issues that were then engulfing the sub-continent.

Ganga Singh was well known to British dignitaries and politicians. He attended King Edward's coronation in 1902; was the only non-Anglo member of the British War Cabinet in World War I; and represented India at the Imperial War Conference in 1917. His commitment to the British *raj* was displayed by the adoption of their favoured Indo-Saracenic style for his Lalgarth Palace in Bikaner (Ramusack, 2004, 148). His brusque manner was nevertheless not always welcomed by the British authorities (Copland, 1997, 48-49). Moreover, his advanced statesmanship should be balanced against a punitive and authoritarian mode of rule. Civil liberty was severely restricted in his state, culminating in a notorious case in which seven people received long sentences for daring to criticise the administration (Singh, 1970, 48-51). He also possessed overriding powers that curtailed the usefulness of his Representative Assembly (Singh, 1970, 90-92).

### *Analysis*

*Bikaner* is an educational film whose subjects range from a general introduction to life in the sub-continent, to an exploration of some features that are particular to the city. There is a repeated use of maps, which illustrate the affect that Bikaner's geographical situation has had upon the city. Maps are also used to indicate specific features of Bikaner, such as its wells, the city wall and the Lalgarth Palace of Ganga Singh. They are always followed by the most obvious of cuts: straight to film of the subject that has been highlighted in the diagram.

Robin Baker has argued that 'From the tone of the commentary this film was clearly aimed at British school children' (Baker), although its distribution to other groups would not have been ruled out. The commentary commonly draws attention to particular facets of the film, and at times requests that the viewer to take note of specifics, such as the various modes of transport being used or the types of clothing that the people are wearing. It is spoken in measured tones, and is left uncluttered due to the fact that there is no use of music on the soundtrack (in its place there is the overdubbing of quiet background noises). A young audience is also appealed to by virtue of the fact that the film features a group of Indian schoolchildren, who can be seen writing on slates during an outdoor class. Their leisure pursuits are also shown; it is pointed out that 'there are no cinemas to go to after school, but there are very funny animal imitators in the streets'. At this point the film cuts to a costumed man who performs an accurate chicken impression. For further entertainment the children can be seen viewing a favoured image of exotic India: the activities of a snake charmer.

In a more serious vein, the film provides a good overview of Bikaner's ingenious irrigation system, which uses the power of gravity to channel water from outlying wells into the heart of the city. It

also provides a brief portrait of Ganga Singh. He is first pictured in the grounds of Lalgarh Palace. The hybrid nature of the architecture is echoed in the life of the palace. Indian and British guests can be seen wandering in the gardens; the lawn is laid out for the European game of croquet; and the prince himself appears dressed in British-styled military costume and sporting a walrus moustache.

The commentary states that Ganga Singh 'is an Indian prince and rules his state quite independently, but he has allied his state by treaty to Great Britain and accepts the King of Great Britain as Emperor of India'. It has nothing further to say about his achievements or about his role in the institutions of Bikaner. Instead the film draws to a close with a curious scene. Here the streets of Bikaner are lined with people as the prince is driven through in his car. The commentary argues that 'the people of Bikaner, like all Indians, enjoy any kind of procession, and they gather to see their ruler drive along the streets'. Whether or not they have been coerced into this assembly is another matter; there is little evident enthusiasm for the passing of the Prince.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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Singh, Laxman, *Political and Constitutional Development in the Princely States of Rajasthan (1920-49)* (New Delhi: Jain Brothers, 1970).

FILM TITLE:

**BRITISH AND INDIAN TROOPS LIBERATE RAMREE TOWN**

[INDIAN ARMY OPERATIONS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA DURING THE SECOND  
WORLD WAR] [Allocated series]

WEB ADDRESS:

<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6357>

## PRODUCTION DATE:

12/2/1945

## PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

India

## PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Public Relations Directorate, India

## SHORT SUMMARY:

On Ramree Island off the Arakan coast of Burma, local civilians welcome British troops, who go sightseeing with a local headman before a Union flag is raised.

## NOTES:

According to the dopesheet Ramree town was first entered by troops of 5th Battalion 1st Punjab Regiment, followed later by 1st Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment on the opposite side (both of these being part of 71st Indian Infantry Brigade).

Ramree was taken after an amphibious invasion led by 26th Indian Division on 21 January 1945. Fifty miles long and twenty miles wide, it presented a large area to clear and housed a considerable Japanese garrison. Its strategic significance derived from its airfields, which besides having the advantage of being supplied from the sea, would give transport squadrons the range to cover a wide area of central Burma. It would also provide a jumping-off point for Operation Dracula, the amphibious assault on Rangoon, which would also be conducted by 26th Indian Division.

## REFERENCES:

Kirby, S Woodburn et al (1965) 'The War Against Japan Vol. IV' (London: HMSO).

## PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Singh, B (Jemadar): cameraman.

## ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

## FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

35mm

## NUMBER OF REELS:

1

## LENGTH:

558 ft

## RUNNING TIME:

7 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

*Context*

During the 1930s Bryan Langley was employed as a cameraman by British International Pictures, where he worked on films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Number Seventeen* (1932). He signed up for military duty in 1941, working for the Army Film Unit for whom he filmed several conflicts (Ogidi). One of his responsibilities was to set up the Indian Army's Public Relations Film Unit, based at Tollygunge, Calcutta (Gladstone). The footage taken by the unit was used internally for Indian Army purposes. Some of the footage was edited into films that received a wider distribution, both in India and, via the Ministry of Information, abroad (for example, *Burma Victory* (1945) and *Johnny Gurkha* (1945)). Langley trained Indian soldiers as cameramen, and he later recalled his satisfaction in teaching 'four or five of those lads' who went on to film military operations in India and Burma (Langley, 1987). Among the cameramen working for Public Relations Directorate was Jemadar Balwant Singh, who filmed these rushes of the liberation of Ramree Town.

The battle for Ramree Island, which is located off the Arakan Coast in Burma, was part of the amphibious advance on the country in 1945. Ramree was of strategic significance for two reasons: it housed airfields from which it was planned to supply the 14<sup>th</sup> Army on the central Burma plain, and it would serve as a jumping-off point for Operation Dracula, the amphibious assault on Rangoon (Bush, 1945). Furthermore, tying down the Japanese divisions in this area would prevent them from reinforcing units on the mainland (Marston, 2003, 179).

On 21 January 1945, the 26<sup>th</sup> Indian Division landed unopposed on Ramree Island (Marston, 2003, 179). However, a large Japanese garrison was stationed on the island, and as troops advanced on Ramree Town on 7 February they met considerable opposition (Kirby, 1965, 220). It took two days to occupy the town. Naval forces then concentrated on blocking escape routes from the island. As a result, many Japanese faced 'indescribable horrors' and died as they tried to leave the island via its mangrove swamps (Bush, 1945). In his dope sheets Singh notes that 'Ramree resistance [sic] cost to Japs about a thousand killed'.

Ashley Jackson has described Burma as being a 'low-priority British colony until it became one of the Empire's major battlegrounds in the Second World War' (Jackson, 2006, 386). Despite being a part of the Empire since 1886, Burma had only recently come under direct British control, having been administered as a province of India until 1937. The early twentieth century had witnessed much anti-British sentiment in the country, and Arakan was the location of several insurgencies against colonial rule (Allen, 1984, 9). The Japanese captured Burma in May 1942. Subsequently, the new occupiers granted Arakan its autonomy, as well as its own army, the Arakan Defence Force. However, in line with several other Burmese factions that had originally sided with the Japanese, the Arakan Defence Force switched its allegiance to the Allies towards the end of the War (Jackson, 2006, 402-03).

### *Analysis*

Jemadar Balwant Singh is clearly a skilled filmmaker. Although this film is comprised of rushes, the various shots that he has chosen would require little editing or verbal accompaniment in order to make their narrative manifest. It is therefore all the more interesting to note which factors of the liberation of Ramree Town he has chosen to highlight. The production date given for Singh's footage is 12 February 1945. His concern is not with the battle against the Japanese. They are not to be seen in this film, which commences after the town had been captured. Instead, the main focus of these rushes is the interaction between the local people and military personnel.

Despite the involvement of Indian troops in this operation, the opening sections of this film focus on the relationships between British troops and Burmese townspeople. The footage opens with a sequence in which a crowd of locals celebrates the arrival of military personnel, who are referred to by the cameraman as being 'security persons'. This sequence is clearly orchestrated. Singh is awaiting the soldiers: his camerawork follows their jeep with a panning movement as it pulls up amongst the town people, who have been lined up to clap and cheer. In his dope sheets Singh remarks that the townspeople were 'very pleased to see them', and there does appear to be delight at the soldiers' (re)arrival. Moreover, despite its obvious propaganda value, there is genuine charm in the footage of the soldiers, as we see them interact with the village children and allow their jeep to be decorated with flowers. In order to capture this sequence of the soldiers' reception, Singh films from a number of positions, and features many individual portraits, effectively capturing both the soldiers' and the townspeople's responses.



According to the dope sheets, the reason for the visit of the security personnel was to give instructions to the town's headmen and to assure them of the 'security of their properties'. This procedure is captured on film, but Singh devotes less time to it than he does to the propaganda-worthy footage of the soldiers' arrival. However, here too there is evidence of his narrative abilities. He films establishing long shots, showing the local men gathered for the soldiers' address, and he also films from amongst them, capturing their enthusiastic reactions as the news unfolds.

Cementing this positive portrayal of the relationship between the locals and their liberators, there is footage of the town's headmen taking the security personnel on a visit to a local pagoda. Here the British soldiers are obviously playing to the camera. It looks as though they have deliberately adopted casual stances in a scene in which they are shown talking to some locals, and their interest in the pagoda is similarly choreographed: they are depicted pointing up at it and absorbing the information that is supplied about it.

It is not until the closing section of the film that any of the liberating Indian soldiers are witnessed onscreen. They are not seen interacting with locals as liberators like the British soldiers, instead they form part of another propaganda ritual: the unfurling of the Union flag. Singh captures a variety of images from a variety of positions. There are medium close-ups of the flag at each stage of its unveiling; there are portrait shots of both the Indian and British troops who are involved in running the flag up its pole; and, most importantly, there are shots of the British troops, the Indian troops, and the local people, who are unified under its banner.

**Richard Osborne (February 2009)**

*Works cited*

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Ogidi, Ann, 'Langley, Bryan (1909-2008)',

<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/778563/index.html>.

NPA 1173

FILM NUMBER

FILM TITLE:

**BRITISH PARAMOUNT NEWS ISSUE 1173**

WEB ADDRESS:

<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6604>

PRODUCTION DATE:

28/5/1942

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

British Paramount News

SHORT SUMMARY

British newsreel covering the British retreat through Burma, an exclusive report by British Paramount cameraman Maurice Ford.

FULL SUMMARY

Opening titles "Burma. A War Correspondent's Despatch. Film and Story by Maurice Ford". A posed shot of British Paramount cameraman Maurice Ford with his Newman Sinclair camera mounted on a tripod opens this newsreel account of British rearguard action in Burma. Late January/February 1942, views of bomb-damaged Rangoon and refugees leaving the city by Irrawaddy steamer and in an overcrowded train. 21 March 1942, shots of traditional field irrigation and Burmese cattle. 1 April 1942, Punjabi engineers laying mines and obstructions in the Irrawaddy with traditional fishing carrying on regardless. February 1942, Bristol Blenheim Mk IVs of RAF 113 Squadron being bombed up for a raid. 22 February 1942, commentary introduces some of the airmen of 113 Squadron seen resting outside their tents, Magwe, Burma, (Wing Commander "Reggie" Stidolph from Southern Rhodesia, Flying Officer Jim Purvis from Halifax Nova Scotia, Wing Commander Bryan Wallis of Dublin, Sergeant Trevor Scott from Wales, Pilot Officer Owen Loane from Australia, Observer Billy Downes from Edgware London, Flight Lieutenant Ivor Beeston from Devon, Flying Officer "Cherry" Orchard from Edinburgh and Squadron Leader Peter Ford from Kensington London), Blenheim aircraft being fuelled from a bowser and bombed up. February 1942, cameraman Maurice Ford is helped into his parachute by Flight Lieutenant Percy Bodley from Johannesburg standing beside a Bristol Blenheim Mk IV aircraft and then accompanies members of 113 Squadron on the raid on Mataban [14 February 1942]. Shots from the aircraft of the Irrawaddy estuary, long shots of Rangoon and the dense jungle. Interior shots taken in the

Bristol Blenheim Mk IV aircraft including film of the pilot Flight Lieutenant Percy Bodley. Air-to-air shots of other Bristol Blenheim Mk IV aircraft. 30 March 1942, Army officers relax and pose for the camera at an unidentified Advance Divisional Headquarters; close-ups of members of the group including Major-General Cowan (wearing a sola topee). Commanding Officer of a Frontier Force Battalion leads a group of Gurkhas into the jungle. Ground-to-air shots of Japanese bombers flying overhead. Long shots of Japanese bombs falling on the undefended town of Toungoo. Night shots of fires in the burning town of Toungoo. Day shots of the damage to the town of Toungoo and a long line of refugees in bullock carts on a road. Close-up shots of various refugees including a mother and small child. March 1942, a shot along a railway line and revealing members of B Company, the Gloucestershire Regiment manning a trench across the tracks, close-up shot of Colonel Bagot, Commander of the 1st Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment. Shot of members of the Gloucestershire Regiment driving along a track in the jungle in Bren Gun Carrier, one of the soldiers is introduced by the commentary as Victor Philatov born in Russia. Other members of the Gloucestershire Regiment are introduced as Arthur Togill from Bristol, Jack Godwin from Cirencester seen with shots of their Italian Breda gun. Lieutenant Christenson of the Gloucestershire Regiment orders the firing of mortars mounted on lorries on some (unseen) retreating Japanese. Cameraman Maurice Ford is seen running along a ditch carrying his camera and tripod. Gloucesters entering a Burmese village after the retreating Japanese and making a house-to-house search. Final shots show a group of the Gloucesters seated in the back of a lorry driving down a road away from the camera followed by a shot of a Burmese sunset.

#### NOTES:

Commentary notes that Maurice Ford also filmed the inferno around St Paul's Cathedral during the London Blitz and refugees in the Battle of France and is said to be heading for Calcutta.

The filming dates and the identification of individual personnel not mentioned in the newsreel commentary are taken from Maurice Ford's original Dope Sheets for the his unedited footage, see B series related items.

Date of raid on Mataban based on extracts from RAF 113 Squadron Operations Record Book supplied by former 113 member Pat Woodward (letter of 1/1/2009 - in Acquisition file): six Blenheims led by C/O W/Cdr Stidolph, including Bodley in Z7791 with fellow SAAF air gunner Gerloff and observer Dumas, attacked the railway station and jetty at Mataban and also strafed barges in a creek four miles north west of the town. (As South African Air Force kept its Army ranks and khaki uniforms, Bodley was actually a 2nd Lieutenant.)

#### RELATED ITEMS:

Unedited footage shot by Maurice Ford in Burma held in the B series see BAY 226, BAY 232, BAY 239, BAY 241, BAY 245, BAY 248, BAY 253. Note original documentation numbering B/226/A etc

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Ford, Maurice: story

Ford, Maurice: cameraman

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

NON-IWM

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/N

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

1122 ft

RUNNING TIME:

13 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTITLES:

None

**Context**

British Paramount, a subsidiary of the US Paramount Company, was founded in 1931 and was one of the five main British newsreel companies operating during World War II. Luke McKernan argues that it was during this period that the newsreels 'found their voice', serving as 'an important means of communicating vital news mixed with propagandist uplift' (McKernan).

The footage in *British Paramount News 1173* was shot by Maurice Ford in February and March of 1942. Ford first entered the film industry in 1927 as a camera assistant for British Instructional Pictures. Thereafter he worked for various companies before being employed by British Paramount News in 1936 ('Maurice Ford'). He was one of the company's first War correspondents, covering the early campaign in France as well as making a noted film of the inferno surrounding St Paul's Cathedral during the Blitz. He was later posted to South Africa and then to Burma. His reports made him something of a star cameraman: by October 1942 he was being billed as 'Paramount's ace war correspondent' ('Maurice Ford'). *British Paramount News 1173*, also known as *Burma: A War Correspondent's Despatch*, was credited as being the 'longest newsreel ever issued by British Paramount'.

Ashley Jackson has argued that in the Second World War, Burma 'never had much of a chance' once Singapore had fallen to the Japanese early in 1942 (Jackson, 2006, 387). Burma was poorly equipped with both supplies and men: prior to 1941 its defence had ranked lower in priority than that of the West Indies (Jackson, 2006, 387). The Japanese 15<sup>th</sup> Army entered the Tenasserim region of Burma in December 1941, taking control of its airfields. In January 1942 the port of Rangoon was brought to a standstill: over two thousand civilians were killed in air raids and 100,000 fled the city (Jackson, 2006, 393). The British rushed troops to defend the city, which was reached by Japanese soldiers on 8 February 1942. The Japanese gained control of Rangoon on 8 March 1942, and by the end of the month they had also defeated Chinese forces in Toungoo, providing them with a strategic platform from which to advance into central Burma (Jackson, 2006, 393). The result was the withdrawal of Allied forces towards India, the longest retreat in British military history.

The British campaign in Burma drew in military forces from throughout the Empire. Largely officered by the British, the campaign included soldiers from the UK, Nepal, East and West Africa, and India, as well as from Burma itself. Although troops from the sub-continent were predominant, it is Louis Allen's opinion that 'the Indian Army was not serving its own people, nor the interests of the people across whose territory the war was fought' (Allen, 1984, 634). The people of Burma in fact had divergent interests. Japanese state-building achieved its greatest success here: Jackson has argued that among the dominant ethnic group, the Burmans, some 'were actively anti-British and willing to work with the Japanese' (Jackson, 2006, 386). He counters that other ethnic groups, including the Karens, Chins, Kachins and Nagas, 'were loyal to the British, or opposed to Japanese or Burman influence, and therefore prepared to support them' (Jackson, 2006, 386).

## Analysis

*British Paramount News 1173* operates on a number of different and sometimes conflicting levels.

The first thing that is notable about the film is how it casts its cameraman as its star. Ford's name is featured in the credits; he is soon introduced in the commentary; and with this introduction he is also featured on screen, shown rotating his Newman Sinclair camera in a posed studio shot (his movement here neatly mirrors 180° panning shots that are included in the film). He makes further filmed appearances in the newsreel, and the commentary often stresses his involvement in what is taking place on screen.

Ford is credited with supplying the 'film and story' for this news report. It nevertheless remains difficult to determine the extent to which it was shaped by Paramount News. On the one hand, there is the evidence of Maurice Ford's 'dope sheets', which are held at the Imperial War Museum. These record Ford's thoughts regarding the material that he was shooting; here he appears to be following his own leads and the film's eventual commentary can be seen to be largely consistent with his beliefs. On the other hand, it has been discovered that the editors of Paramount News would often plan out their stories in advance, and that the cameramen would often be expected to illustrate previously written commentaries (Hiley and McKernan, 2001, 192). Although Ford is credited with writing the film's script, he does not speak it. It is difficult to know what decisions were made by Paramount in editing the material, or whose idea it was to centre the film around its cameraman.

This decision causes problems in the resulting film. Although the film provides valuable and often exclusive footage of the retreat through Burma, the story is edited in accordance with what is portrayed as being Ford's personal philosophy. Early in his script he recalls Kipling's 'East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet', which he now counters with 'one touch of high-explosive makes the whole world kin'. Consequently, the film attempts to present the Burmese as our fellow citizens, both of the world and of the War. Footage of Rangoon's own 'Piccadilly Circus' is shown as an indication of this commonality, and the film is careful to give the Burmese nothing but praise. They are commended for taking their fate philosophically, and there is no disapprobation for them abandoning their cities: 'all they did know is that unless they cleared out they'd be bombed again: that's the sort of thing that's understood just as well in Burma as in Plymouth or Rheims or Coventry'.

The film isn't always consistent with comments that Ford makes in his dope sheets. From these we can see how the story was simplified in order to make it more positive. Ford reveals his knowledge of Burmese people who are 'doing their best to help the Japs', a subject that is not mentioned in this

film ('Burma and Bridge Protection'). In addition, he captured footage of Burmese 'fifth column blokes', whom he filmed in handcuffs at the Irrawaddy River, but those images are not to be seen ('General Yu & Ships Leave Rangoon').

Despite its attempts at simplification, the film's message remains unclear. Some of the images that are meant to show commonality also show difference (for example, the Burmese Piccadilly Circus has nothing of the hustle and bustle of the junction in London). Elsewhere Ford is drawn to images that contrast east and west (at one point he provides a carefully choreographed shot in which one of the Allies' modern military vehicles passes by the camera to reveal the 'ancient irrigation gadgets' of the Burmese). Moreover, there is a fundamental difference in the ways in which Ford's commentary and camerawork treat the Burmese people and the way they treat the Allied troops. Ford admitted that 'They [the Burmese] don't like to be photographed' and that for them the process could be 'rather humiliating' ('Docks at Hi-Speed'). Unfortunately, this is borne out in his ethnographic shots of the Burmese men who are working the irrigation system: they grimace awkwardly for the camera.

It is Ford's presence in the film that does most to disturb its portrayal of the commonality between east and west. At one point in the film Ford provides individual portraits of members of 113 Squadron; here the commentary gives us a roll call of the airmen's names and they smile pleasantly for him. Ford is familiar with these airmen and he stresses his involvement in their actions; in doing so, however, the film reveals his lack of a similar relationship with the Burmese people (none of whom is named). While the airmen are being highlighted, the commentary informs us of their home countries: Southern Rhodesia, Nova Scotia, Ireland, Wales, Australia, England, Scotland. Although they have varied backgrounds, they are all white; it therefore comes as a surprise to hear them described as 'pretty much representing the whole Empire'. It is also curious that among these men was Karorilal Bhatia of the Indian Air Force, who was filmed but ended up on the cutting room floor ('Burma Blenheim Bomber Boys').

Indian troops *are* featured in the film: we are shown the activities of Punjab engineers, who are described as being 'better men a good deal I should say than the Japanese'. However, they are shown operating as a self-contained unit and, for once, the commentary does not mention Ford's involvement in the action taking place on screen. Despite the ostensible intentions of this film, west and east are seldom seen to meet.

**Richard Osborne (July 2010)**



### Works cited

- Allen, Louis, *Burma: The Longest War 1941-5* (London and Melbourne: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1984).
- 'Burma and Bridge Protection', 19 March 1942, Maurice Ford Dope Sheet, Imperial War Museum, Ref: B253/A1.
- 'Burma Blenheim Bomber Boys', 22 February 1942, Maurice Ford Dope Sheet, Imperial War Museum, Ref: BAY245/3.
- 'Docks at Hi-Speed', Maurice Ford Dope Sheet, Imperial War Museum, Ref: B232/A3.
- 'General Yu & Ships Leave Rangoon', 28 February 1942, Maurice Ford Dope Sheet, Imperial War Museum, Ref: B248/A.
- Hiley, Nicholas and Luke McKernan, 'Reconstructing the News: British Newsreel Documentation and the British Universities Newsreel Project', *Film History*, 13/2 (2001), 185-99.
- Jackson, Ashley, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (Hambledon Continuum, 2006).
- 'Maurice Ford', British Universities Film and & Video Council,  
[http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/staff/detail.php?id=32855&issue\\_id=26325&story\\_id=027793&referral=BUND](http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/search/staff/detail.php?id=32855&issue_id=26325&story_id=027793&referral=BUND).
- McKernan, Luke, 'Newsreels', Screenonline,  
<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/476463/index.html>.

<b>Film Number</b>	COI 497
<b>Film Title</b>	<b>BURMA VICTORY</b>
<b>Web Address</b>	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2509">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2509</a>
<b>Production Date</b>	11/1945
<b>Production Country</b>	GB
<b>Production Sponsor</b>	Ministry of Information
<b>Production Company</b>	British Army Film Unit British, Indian, and American combat cameramen of SEAC (from material taken by)

Film about the Allied victory in Burma.

Introduction briefly outlines the geography and climate of Burma, and the extent of the Japanese conquests. The film then describes the establishment of SEAC under Mountbatten, "a born innovator and firm believer in the unorthodox", and gives a comparatively detailed account of subsequent military events, including the Battle of Imphal-Kohima and Slim's drive on Mandalay, Arakan landings, the northern offensive of the Americans and Chinese under Stilwell, and the roles played by Chindits and Merrill's Marauders. The film ends with the capture of Rangoon and the Japanese surrender. Thematic elements include: (1) The difficulties of climate, terrain, and the endemic diseases of dysentery, malaria, etc., "...enemies more deadly than the Jap." (2) The vital role of air supplies - "the army of the jungle advanced on the wings of the air force" - and air evacuation of the wounded "...the supreme service which Admiral Mountbatten secured for his command." (3) The shattering of the myth of Japanese invincibility. (4) The secondary role of the Burma campaign in overall Allied strategy.

<b>References</b>	COI file - script, production information, other documentation
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<b>Production Credits</b>	Boulting, Roy (Captain): director Macdonald, David (Lieutenant-Colonel): in charge of production Boulting, Roy (Captain): supervising film editor Best, Richard (Sergeant): film editor Clarke, Frank (Sergeant): film editor Watson, Norman (Lieutenant): production manager Harvey, Frank (Captain): commentary written Rawsthorne, Alan (Sergeant): music composer
<b>Production Cast</b>	King-Wood, David: commentator Brandt, Ivan: commentator Clarke, Frank: commentator
<b>Film/Video Format</b>	P 1/35/N
<b>Number of Reels</b>	6
<b>Length</b>	5577 ft
<b>Running Time</b>	62 mins
<b>Black &amp; White/Colour</b>	B&W
<b>Silent/Sound</b>	comopt
<b>Language of Soundtrack</b>	English
<b>Language of Main Titles</b>	English
<b>Language of Subtitles</b>	None
<b>Context Date</b>	1945 (before)
<b>Index: People</b>	Cochran, Philip C

Leese, Oliver W H  
 Merrill, Frank D  
 Mountbatten, Louis (Earl)  
 Seagrave (Dr)  
 Slim, William J  
 Stilwell, Joseph W  
 Wingate, Orde C

**Index:** GB.A & Army 14

### **Units/Organisations**

### **Index: Objects**

aircraft, British - combat: Bristol Blenheim  
 aircraft, United States - combat: Curtiss P-40N/S Warhawk  
 aircraft, United States - combat: Republic P-47 Thunderbolt  
 aircraft, United States - glider: Waco CG-4A  
 aircraft, United States - transport: Douglas C-47 Skytrain  
 armour, British - tank: Valentine Mk III  
 armour, United States - tank: M3 General Grant  
 armour, United States - tank: M4A1 Sherman  
 armour, United States - tank: M5 Stuart  
 combat, Allied  
 strategy, Allied  
 transport, United States military - truck: GMC CCKW-352-12C1  
 transport, United States military - truck: Studebaker US6-U2  
 weapons, British - CBW: flamethrower  
 weapons, British - gun: 5.5-inch  
 weapons, British - rocket: bazooka  
 weapons, British - smallarm: Vickers machine gun

**Index: Places** Burma

**Access Conditions** IWM

### *Context*

*Burma Victory* has its origins in a project that was conceived in 1944 by Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, head of South-East Asia Command (see Mackenzie, 2001, 126). He desired a full-length film that would tell the story of Allied forces in South-East Asia in World War II. Ultimately this became a film about the Burmese Campaign. Mountbatten's project was complicated by his ambitions. He stated that the film should cover 'all the principal activities of South East Asia Command', adding that 'As such a film will cover Allied troops it should be a joint production – British and American' (quoted in Jardine, 1988, 60). Here he faced two problems. First, the US had different military reasons for being in Burma: a wish to reopen the land route to China as opposed to the need to recapture a British colony. Second, they had a specific desire regarding how their actions should be perceived: the US resolutely did *not* wish to be seen to be supporting Britain's imperial project (see Stockwell, 2001, 476)

Mountbatten wrote to the US Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, about the film and requested that Frank Capra be assigned to it. Work commenced but parties in America remained uneasy about the project. A memo addressed to 'American Officials Only' stated that there would 'seem to be a good deal to be said against continuing the attempt to produce a cinematic document purporting to show an identity of American and British interests and objectives in Southeast Asia' (quoted in Jardine, 1988, 60). The Ministry of Information nevertheless insisted that there had only ever been one, common objective, 'namely to fight and defeat the Japanese wherever they are' (quoted in Jardine, 1988, 62).

Bearing this in mind, the planned film would not address the colonial status of Burma, a country with mixed reactions to British rule. While some Burmese fought alongside the British during the military campaign, others supported the Japanese. There were further factions who fought alongside the Japanese only to change sides later in the campaign (see Jackson, 2006, 386, 402-03). Instead, the film's aim would be to bring to notice this 'forgotten war', focusing on the construction of the Ledo Road in northern Burma and on the triumph of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army as they retook the country from the Japanese.

Despite this military emphasis the combined Anglo-American project collapsed. Mountbatten eventually conceded that the two countries were at 'variance in the [Burmese] theatre' (quoted in Jardine, 1988, 63). It was instead agreed to share the source material to create two separate films.

The US military produced *The Stilwell Road* (1945) while the UK project was handed over to producer David MacDonald and director Roy Boulting, who between them had earlier made the Oscar-winning documentary *Desert Victory* (1943).

The film's complicated genesis helped to delay its release. *Burma Victory* eventually came out in October 1945, following the cessation of hostilities. It was nevertheless warmly received; in part because it was seen as a correction to a further American film, the fictionalised *Objective Burma* (1945), which portrayed the US as being responsible for what had been an Allied campaign (see Mackenzie, 2001, 127). The *Monthly Film Bulletin* wrote that 'This is a masterly survey of a vast and complex campaign, presented with vivid realism' (*MFB*, 30 November 1945, 129), and the *Kinematograph Weekly* labelled it an 'Outstanding documentary' (*KW*, 1 November 1945, 25).

*Burma Victory* was also praised in the US. Peter Burnup, writing in the *Motion Picture Herald* stated that it 'is majestic, not only in its convincing authenticity, but in its story of the unimaginable terrors of the jungle and the unconquerable human spirit' (*MPH*, 3 November 1945, 6). It also achieved greater notice in America than *The Stilwell Road*, which was not distributed commercially (see Jardine, 1988, 65). *Burma Victory* meanwhile achieved wide distribution in both the UK and the US. A spokesman for its distributors, Warner Brothers, claimed that 'the picture will reach a greater audience in America than any other British war-feature that has ever been shown there' (*DFR*, 15 November 1945, 20).

### *Analysis*

*Burma Victory* has a different outlook and different ambitions to many World War II documentaries, affected by both the broad time period it covers and by the film's long gestation. Because the war had concluded by the time the film was released its propaganda values were diminished. Ian Jardine has argued that *Burma Victory* instead served as 'a record, a portrait, a history, rather than an urgent plea to command public support' (Jardine, 2001, 127). The film aims to provide a comprehensive account of the Burma Campaign, employing various devices to underline its authority. There is a repeated use of maps, which outline each stage of the military project. In addition, the film employs multiple narrators, each commenting on different areas of the country as though providing on-the-spot reports. Jardine nevertheless argues that *Burma Victory*'s historical credibility is 'worse than useless' (Jardine, 2001, 68). His main complaint is that the filmmakers' needs to balance both American and British interests as well as to entertain Mountbatten's various demands led to biases and falsities.

It was not only the politics of the production that led to distortions and omissions: key elements of the campaign had not been captured on film (see Best, 27 February 1945). To rectify this some parts of the action were recreated in the studio. These provide some of the weakest moments in the film, such as Mountbatten's overdubbed speeches and the awkward conferences among the military leaders. There is also a discrepancy between those parts of the film that could be planned ahead (such as the activities of the Chindits) and those for which the filmmakers were reliant on the rushes provided by military units (including some of the major battle scenes).

A wide distribution was desired for this film and this also affected the way in which was constructed. Lord Burnham, senior military adviser to the Ministry of Information, stated that "The picture must be good entertainment or it fails before it starts. If it is not extensively booked and widely seen it has no value'. He was particularly conscious of the viewing practices of American audiences, stating that "The American public are allergic to official material of any kind and a version of an official dispatch illustrated by indifferently relevant visual would not go with a swing. It is therefore advisable to include some things which the purist might think "not quite nice"' (Burnham). To this end the film repeatedly features the corpses of Japanese soldiers.

*Burma Victory* employs two major narrative devices. Maps and a third-person commentary are used to detail the wider scope of the war. Used alone, this material may have been too dry for a cinema audience. Therefore, we got the second narrative trope. As the advance upon the Japanese gets underway, the film recounts the action through a diarist's entries. This device brings a 'liveness' to the images that are on display and it also provides a character with whom the audience can identify.

The construction of the film was also affected by the nature of the war in Burma. The campaign ended somewhat anticlimactically; the Japanese surrendered due to the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki rather than because of the battles in the field. Perhaps as a result the Japanese role in the Burma campaign is downplayed. There is instead an emphasis on the natural discomforts that the soldiers had to battle - 'malaria, dysentery and typhus – enemies more deadly than the Jap'. The subject with which the film opens, and which recurs throughout the film, is the struggle against monsoons. The Japanese, nevertheless, are clearly depicted as being an enemy. When the film moves away from its dispassionate third-person commentary it employs some harsh language. For example, in his overdubbed speech Mountbatten refers to 'the Jap' as 'an unintelligent slum-dweller'.

Despite its constraints the film provides a fascinating account of the campaign in Burma, not least in its portrayal of the subjects of the British colonies. Some of the interest here is due to the filmmakers' intentions. Although there is no mention of Burmese politics, the film does offer glimpses of the Burmese during the war. There is footage of what appears to be the genuine gratitude and excitement of liberated peoples. The film also depicts a Pwe festival. Here the diarist narrator contrasts the pleasure of the Burmese, who 'certainly made a day of it', with the bemusement of the white military troops - 'saw Bill Slim, looking a bit self-conscious, with victory garlands around his neck'. The film also provides a more unwitting display of colonial attitudes. Although it carefully outlines the multinational composition of the Allied forces (the scenes of Mountbatten's speeches deliberately depict as many different military units as possible), Asiatic people have a clear place in the chain of command. For example, the parties involved in the construction of the Ledo Road are demarcated as follows: 'On the heels of the fighters came American engineer reconnaissance parties [...]. Behind – the first Bulldozer [...]. Last – the builders. Chinese, Shans, Kachins, Karens, Indians, Nepalese, Nagas – men, women and children'. The film also foregrounds the activities of British personnel, most clearly in its staged material such as the diarist's entries or the jungle camp at night. This despite the fact that Indian troops made up the largest proportion of 14<sup>th</sup> Army personnel (see Allen, 1984, 634).

Finally, the film maintains a distinct attitude towards Burma itself. From the outset the country is portrayed as being anything other than a foreign paradise. Here the film's opening is particularly interesting. It begins with a soldier reading about the charms of the Burmese landscape, climate and people in a travel brochure. He then adds bitterly 'would you believe it?' and the sound of a monsoon increases in volume. This comment on how media can distort is complicated by the fact that it is itself a staged scene, filmed in Pinewood studios. From hereon there is a repeated stress on the hostility of Burma - 'what a country this is!' exclaims the diarist. This part of the Empire is consistently depicted as being alien to the British.

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**CALCUTTA TOPICAL NO. 1 FOR 1925**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4497>  
 Title Ref:  
 Director:  
 Prod. Country: IN  
 Year: 1925  
 Production Company: Madan Theatres  
 Release Date: 1925  
 Format: 35  
 Length: 377 Feet 115 Metres  
 Colour Code: B  
 Sound System: SLNT

*Synopsis*

The King Emperor's horse race at Calcutta, India.

Government of India Censor Certificate (6). Main title (10). "The King Emperor's Cup Race 1925" (18). Scenes at Calcutta race track, Europeans passing the camera entering the course (102). "Scenes in the Paddock" (106). Indians lead round a number of horses watched by the crowd (133). Horses are led to the racecourse through a crowd-lined avenue (179). The horses on the course (196). The crowds, mainly European but some Indians (232). "The Start" (234). LS start of the race (250). "The Exciting Finish" (253). Same (264). "Won by Orange William" (267). The horses are led to the enclosure (278). The horse, Orange William, is stopped in front of the camera then moves on (286). The jockey dismounts, the horse is unsaddled; MS of the horse (313). MS the jockey and two other men who pose for the camera (326). MS of the King-Emperor's cup (331). Further scenes of the race course and the crowds (375). "The End" (377ft).

*Context*

The Indian company Madan Theatres produced *Calcutta Topical No. 1* in 1925. Madan Theatres was at this time the largest distribution chain in India (Rajadhyaksha, 1986, 51). They had been responsible for the first Bengali feature film, *Billvamangal* (1919); they were the largest importer of films in the sub-continent; and they would go on to make the first Bengali talking picture *Jamai*

*Shashbi* (1931) (Sharma, 2004). During the silent era many Indian studios produced 'topicals', short films that reported on recent happenings and social occasions (Gautaman, 1996). Madan Theatres' Calcutta series aimed to show 'all the leading events of the season' (Baker, 2009).

This first episode covers the King Emperor's Cup Race, held at the Calcutta Race Course in 1925. This course is home to the 'Royal Calcutta Turf Club', which holds 'Pride of place in Organised racing in India' ('Royal Calcutta Turf Club', 2009). Founded by the British in 1947, the Calcutta Turf Club did not admit its first Indian member until 1908. Its imperial outlook is reflected in the title given to this race, as well as in the addition of the term 'Royal' to the club's name (bestowed in 1912 to honour a visit by King George V).

M. N. Srinivas has argued that prior to independence the bulk of Indian people experienced westernization only 'indirectly and gradually', but he adds that 'From a geographical point of view the inhabitants of coastal areas, especially those close to the fast-growing port towns, were favorably suited to undergo primary Westernization' (Srinivas, 1968, 61-62). He further states that 'The three presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras attracted elements of the Indian population who quite early showed a sensitivity to the new commercial, educational, and other opportunities' provided by the British presence' (Srinivas, 1968, 62-63). Judith Brown concurs but believes that such opportunities were only 'possible for the few'; she also points out that 'British social aloofness, particularly in the club and family setting, limited their informal influence on Indian lives' (Brown, 1994, 249-50).

During the mid-1920s Calcutta and the province of Bengal were home to some of the strongest elements of the Indian nationalist movement. The governor Lord Lytton encountered opposition from the Swarajist party led by C. R. Das, and as a result halted the implementation of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms that had granted power to Indians within local government (Lytton, 1942, 9). In addition he encountered a violent terrorist movement, which was only thwarted when Lytton was granted emergency powers, leading to the arrest of over 50 nationalist leaders, including Subhas Chandra Bose (*The Times*, 29 October 1924, 15).

### *Analysis*

*Calcutta Topical Number One* provides an interesting study of British influence in India. The experience of the British racecourse is imported almost wholesale to the sub-continent. The form of the race, the style of betting, the design of the cup, the racers and the majority of the horses are all western in

origin ('Royal Calcutta Turf Club', 2009), as is the majority of the crowd. The film itself is preoccupied with western attire. Its longest scenes depict the perambulations of the racegoers. Here the camera is attracted to those who are dressed in the most modern 1920s styles (scenes tend to be cut when someone wearing less fashionable clothing walks into view). Contemporary fashion is particularly in evidence among the younger women attendees.

A lengthy introduction depicting crowds arriving at the course is followed by a section entitled 'Scenes in the Paddock'. Again, the camera stays focused on the spectators. The scene begins with a panned shot from the crowd to the horses being paraded. The following scenes are always framed so that we can view both the racegoers and the horses.

The footage of the King Emperor's Cup Race is severely truncated. There is a quick edit from the start straight to what a title card describes as being 'the exciting finish'. The lack of attention given to the race is probably not only attributable to the filmmakers' priorities: filming the entire course would also have required multiple cameras. Moreover, it is apparent that the filmmakers wish to relate the story of the sporting event. During the paddock scenes the camera had focused primarily on the eventual winner, and following the victory the rider, horse and owner are each posed for the camera. There is also a close-up of the cup that they have won.

Although Indian racegoers are vastly outnumbered, one of the most striking features of the film is their presence in the crowd. Here there is a difference between the male and female attendees. The majority of the Indian men are wearing western clothes; some are in fashionable 1920s attire, including a man in a three-piece suit, white shoes and trilby who becomes the main focus of the camera's attention. The Indian men are not seen in groups. The Indian women, meanwhile, usually appear collectively and, although dressed in their finery, they commonly wear traditional Indian clothing, typically saris. Indian men and women are not usually seen together. Elsewhere in the film, Indians are depicted in a more subservient role. One function of the Indian staff is to lead the horses in the paddock; Indians are also seen in uniform, serving as guards and stewards.

*Calcutta Topical Number One* depicts a life far removed from the struggle for independence. Here a westernised social event is proudly on display. The race appears to have been a high social occasion for both the British and Indian members of the crowd. However, this is a gathering that, on the surface at least, appears to be tolerant and at ease with itself. A wide variety of styles can be witnessed among both the British and Indian attendees, some of them outré (one British woman can

be seen wearing a gentleman's top hat). Moreover, this gathering of cultures is depicted intermingling freely.

**Richard Osborne (June 2009)**

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## CEYLAN, VÉCU ET PITTORESQUE

Web Address

<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4687>

Technical Data

Year:

1905

Running Time:

3 minutes

Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

Colour:

Black/White

Sound:

Silent

Footage:

215

Production Credits

Production Company

Pathé Frères

### Synopsis

Shots taken from a moving train; a man shaving another man's head and trimming his beard; women and children bathing in a river; a mongoose fights with a snake; mule carts in a street; children swimming in a river; elephants bathing.

### Colonial Film Synopsis

Title card: 'Views and People in Ceylon'. Shots taken from the front of a train as it moves along a railway track. Train passes through tunnels in the mountains and past open fields. Medium shot of barber trimming balding man's head, armpits and beard with a razor blade; customer inspects himself in a mirror. Panned shot, left to right, of males and females bathing in a river. Street entertainer on a platform engages a snake and a mongoose and a snake in a fight. Street scene filmed from a tram, following two-wheeled oxen carts. Sequence filmed from an open goods wagon on a train, looking forwards towards passenger carriage. The train pulls into a station and then passes through a plantation and over a bridge. Medium long shot of Ceylonese boys on rafts in a river. The boys leap off the rafts into the water as they are thrown something to catch. Four elephants being held and then mounted by mahouts. The same elephants immersed in a wide river; the mahouts

stand on their backs. The elephants stand and splash water towards the camera with their trunks. Further shots of the elephants bathing in the water.

### Context

By 1905, Pathé-Frères was the largest film company in France and was emerging as the ‘first acknowledged global *empire* in cinema history (Abel, ‘Pathé-Frères’, emphasis in original). The company’s success rested on the mass production of films and on distributing its releases via a worldwide network (Abel, 1994, 22). Pathé had established an agency in Britain in 1902, and by 1906 had opened further agencies in Russia, America, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Holland, Spain and Italy (McKernan; Abel, 1994, 23). By 1905 the company was selling 12,000 metres of positive film stock per day (Abel, ‘Pathé-Frères’)

Although the majority of Pathé’s films were fiction titles, the company also produced a large number of travelogues. Tom Gunning describes the travelogue as being ‘the genre of early film that is most clearly prepared for by pre-cinematic practice’ (Gunning, 1995, 21). The genre developed from preceding media representations of travel, such as magic lantern shows, illustrated lectures, postcards and pictorial magazines, and thus had a readymade and cognisant audience. There were also other reasons for the travelogues’ success: these films were inexpensive to produce, and they provided exhibitors with film material that they could easily edit together into their own compilations (Musser, 1990, 123; Abel 1994, 91).

Jennifer Lynn Peterson proposes that it was around 1905-06 that ‘travelogues solidified into a distinct film genre’ (Peterson, ‘Travelogues’). Films were usually comprised of a series of discreet sequences; they featured a large number of long shots; and there would be movement in almost every scene (either created by camera movement or by the action on screen) (Peterson, ‘Travelogues’). Many would begin with views of landscapes, taken from the point-of-view of a ship or train (Rony, 1996, 83). It was also during this period that the French companies, Eclipse, Gaumont and ‘especially’ Pathé-Frères, established themselves as the most renowned makers of travel films (Peterson, ‘Travelogues’).

Travelogues served to promote tourism (hence several of them were sponsored by railroad companies), but also provided glimpses of foreign lands to those who could not visit them themselves (Rony, 1996, 82). Nominally educational, the films were fixated upon the picturesque, ‘scenic’ originally being the most common term used to describe them (Peterson, ‘Travelogues’).

They also regularly featured ethnographic studies of people, providing the viewer with what Rony describes as an “‘archive’ of human variation’ (Rony, 1996, 85). Although shown in a variety of contexts, including lectures, fairground shows and movie theatres, travelogues were aimed primarily at an educated audience, and erred towards the point of view of a ‘bourgeois tourist’ (Peterson, ‘Travelogues’; Rony, 1996, 83). Travelogues also often served as imperial propaganda. Peterson states that ‘Colonial lands appear as tranquil as parks; any explicit sense of social conflict is banished from the travelogue world-view’ (Peterson, ‘Travelogues’).

This travelogue is, however, a French film about Ceylon, which from 1802 to 1948 was a British colony. Chandra Richard de Silva has written that at the beginning of the twentieth century ‘British power in the island seemed more secure than ever’ (de Silva, 1987, 185). Nevertheless, there were stirrings of popular agitation in Ceylon (notably from the Buddhist temperance movement) as well as some outbreaks of labour unrest (de Silva, 1987, 186-87). Moreover, the plantation economy, in particular the tea trade, prompted the arrival of increasing numbers of Indian Tamil workers to the island. Roy Moxham notes that by 1900 there were 300,000 Indian Tamils working on the tea estates and that their presence was ‘resented by the native Sinhalese’ (Moxham, 2003, 183-84).

### **Analysis**

The emphases of this film are made clear in its title, *Ceylan, Vécu et Pittoresque* (Ceylon, lived and picturesque). This is a ‘scenic’, one that aims to present the life of Ceylon in the most attractive manner. It has many of the hallmarks of the early travelogue genre.

The film begins with a sequence filmed from a tourist’s point-of-view. The camera is placed on a train in motion, capturing the rugged landscape between Colombo and Kandy. Later in the film there are further scenes filmed from an accelerating train. These sequences not only provide the sense of movement and geographical framing that was expected of travelogues, they also convey what Charles Musser describes as the ‘sensation of separation which the traveller feels on viewing the rapidly passing landscape’ (Musser, 1990, 127). There is also a clear sense of separation between the type of people who are using the train, and those who are situated within the landscape. Uniformed porters and richly-attired European passengers can be glimpsed at a station, contrasting with locals, who can be glimpsed momentarily as the train speeds through the countryside, and who wear impoverished attire. Shots filmed from a tram that is passing through the streets of Colombo provide a different perspective. Here, situated among the movement of the workmen’s carts, the viewer is offered a point-of-view more akin to that of the local Sinhalese.



In the remaining scenes the local people are placed in the centre of the screen, and here a different sense of separation is conveyed. These 'lived' scenes of Ceylon are all purposefully arranged for the camera. The people are either performing to it (as with the bathing scenes and the shots of the elephant), or their action dominates the centre of the screen (as with the footage of the barber and customer, and the street entertainer's mongoose and snake). At no point in any of these scenes is there a white person in the frame; the film instead provides ethnographic portraits of the Sinhalese.

In this film the 'lived' and the 'picturesque' elements of Ceylon are combined. The local people provide movement and spectacle, and they are commonly framed as being a part of the natural environment. This is conveyed by filming them in the water (either bathing or playing), and by depicting them with animals, who they can train to fight (as with the cobra and the mongoose) or perform tricks (as with the elephants). This film aims to present the local people in a light-hearted manner. Nevertheless, the distance that exists between the viewer and viewed sometimes works against this. Not all of the bathers look comfortable being captured on film, and some of the people appear to be uncertain about the tasks that they are made to perform and/or the way that they are being arranged for the screen.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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MGH 6250

FILM NUMBER

FILM TITLE:

**the CHANGING EAST - INDIA [PART 1]**

[COLONEL HODGKINSON AMATEUR FILM] [Series]

PRODUCTION DATE:

1952 ?

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

SHORT SUMMARY:

Part one of two (second part is MGH 6251).

FULL SUMMARY:

Handpainted illustration of sunrise behind mountains and a line of (Indian) people stretching into the distance. Titles are superimposed over images: "The Changing East" "India" "Produced by Frank Outram" "The Story of Pingling and Pinchio was filmed on the Daily Mail Expedition to Assam" "Edited by Frank Outram and Frank Worth".

A British officer stands in front of a wall map, points to mid-Atlantic then India. Focus in on India. Indian military bands and troops march in the grounds of Government House, Delhi. Close-up of a mounted British officer. Close-up of one of the Governor General Bodyguards (mounted Sikh with red tunic). Further shots of the Governor General's Bodyguards. Long shot of various Indian dancers, some in tribal clothes. further scenes of the tattoo, including motorbike stunt riders, men manoeuvring and firing field guns, and the Camel Corps.

Still shots of the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta. Street scenes. Close-up of a holy man (fakir?), and a small shrine next to him. More street scenes, beggars. Close-up of feet treading clay. A man sculpting a figure. Close-ups of the finished sculptures of Indian gods. More street scenes, including cattle and carts. Acharya Kripalani at railway station. Blocks of ice being loaded onto train. Further scenes at the platform with Kripalani. A woman holds a bunch of flowers, a man selling magazines walks passed. Food being served on a leaf. A groom (?) with red turban and gold accessories. Close-up of little girl. Close-up of bride (?) and men. Further scenes at the station. People on the street in a dust storm.

[Black & White] Tribespeople carrying expedition gear through rainforest (in Assam). Close-up of leeches on leaves, then on hands and feet. Group shot of tribespeople, some smoking pipes. Close-up of feet hiking through forest. Heavy rain. Close-up of a leech in water. Close-up of people hiking through forest.

[Colour] Tents in the rainforest. Primitive huts in the rainforest. Close-ups of tribespeople. Scenes of hill-tribe's life – tending plants, felling trees. Shots of bush fires, and cleared land. Tribesman planting seeds in singed earth. Close-ups of tribespeople. Close-up of tribesman with baby on his back. A cockerel outside a hut. Tribespeople walking into the forest. Close-ups of flora and fauna, including a leaf insect and snake. The tribespeople build a shelter from branches and leaves, then light a fire. They cut more foliage and branches and prepare a trap. They cross a river on a log bridge. Scenes of them shooting a boar with a bow and arrow. A frog in a stream. Fungi on a log. Picking wild strawberries (?). The tribespeople return to the village where they light a fire and cook. Close-up of a dog eating scraps. Shot of a man smoking. Long -shot of mountainous landscape, and fires on the hillside.

Back to the parade at Government House, Delhi. Further scenes of Indian military bands marching, British troops and mounted Indian troops. Close-ups of the Royal Scots Fusilier drummers and pipers (Cameron's). Lord and Lady Mountbatten in ceremonial costume walking out of Government House. Long-shot of a roll-call of officers and dignitaries (?) on the steps of Government House. Further shots of the military parade. Large group of (Indian) people walking through Government House Gardens.

A group portrait of Mountbatten with the first cabinet members of Independent India (?), including Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and Sardar Baldev Singh. Close-ups including one of a woman (Indira Gandhi ?). British officers talking. Further shots of Nehru and Mountbatten talking.

Servants? carrying goods on their heads in the grounds of Government House. Views of the gardens, fountains and flowers. A large group of Indian men and boys gathered in the grounds. A man gives instructions, they disperse and begin gardening.

Close-up of two Indian men talking in the grounds of Government House. Guests arrive and wander around the gardens. Ditty Hodgkinson (Colonel Hodgkinson's wife) can be seen in some shots, wearing a red dress. Lord and Lady Mountbatten arrive at the garden party. Each guest is

greeted with a handshake. General views of the gardens. Close-up of Lady Mountbatten talking to a guest. Other guests eating food. More views of the gardens. Close-ups of flowers. A solitary guard in the grounds, with Government House behind.

#### NOTES:

Allocated Title taken from Hodgkinson's original can markings.

Date: refers to stock dates on Kodachrome [Note - Production date is probably a few years later than some earlier footage - LJT]

Technical: film marked "copy"

Parts of this film appear in MGH 6244 and MGH 6245

This film formed part of "The Changing East" programme of feature films which Hodgkinson made, presented and narrated at venues around Britain. See printed programme in Acquisition File.

Summary: subject related to Partition of India in August 1947.

#### PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Hodgkinson, Frank Outram (Lieutenant-Colonel): cameraman

Hodgkinson, Frank Outram: Editor

Worth, Frank: Editor

#### ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

#### FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/16/A

#### NUMBER OF REELS:

1

#### RUNNING TIME:

43 mins ca

#### BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

Colour

B&W

#### SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

#### LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

None

#### LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

None

## LANGUAGE OF SUBTITLES:

None

**Context**

The footage of India in this film was shot by Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Outram Hodgkinson and formed part of his 'The Changing East' programme of films. These three feature-length films, covering 'Burma and Siam', 'India' and 'Kashmir', portrayed the varying circumstances of these countries in the period following the Second World War. A pamphlet produced to accompany their screenings describes Hodgkinson as a 'British film producer and writer' who 'knows the East from long years of residence and professional film making'. It adds that 'During the war he commanded a British Film Unit under Lord Louis Mountbatten', indicating that Hodgkinson was in charge of the film unit that formed part of Mountbatten's South East Asia Command (SEAC). The material included in 'The Changing East' was not shot for official military purposes, however; instead it is Hodgkinson's own, amateur colour footage. 'The Changing East' was toured throughout Britain in the late 1940s and early 1950s: the pamphlet boasts of screenings at professional venues; factories; the House of Commons; and finally 'a Command Performance at Buckingham Palace'. Hodgkinson accompanied the screening of these films with his own 'viva voce commentary'.

The first part of Hodgkinson's film of India depicts the political transformation of the sub-continent. It includes footage of Lord Mountbatten, who became the last British Viceroy of India on 21 February 1947, and was charged with the responsibility of overseeing the transfer of power to the independent governments of India and Pakistan. The film concentrates heavily on Delhi at the time of Indian independence. Hodgkinson records one of the final military tattoos, conducted for Mountbatten at his residence, Government House, and the film shows Mountbatten on 15 August 1947, the day of independence, swearing in the ministers of the new government at the Durbar Hall. On this date Mountbatten stood down as Viceroy, but agreed to stay on in India for a limited term, serving as Governor-General. He was close to Jawaharlal Nehru, the new Prime Minister, and it has been argued that he influenced the composition of Nehru's first cabinet, including the appointment of Sardar Patel (Ziegler, 1985, 424).

Also included in the film are sequences showing street scenes in Calcutta and a long section that focuses upon a mountain tribe, described in the pamphlet as being 'the world's smallest community'. One of the film's title cards labels this latter segment as being 'The Story of

Pingling and Pinchio', stating that it was 'filmed on the Daily Mail Expedition to Assam' (Frank Worth, a friend of Hodgkinson's and a fellow military cameraman, is credited with co-editing this footage). As neither 'Pingling' nor 'Pinchio' is the name of an Indian mountain tribe, it is possible that they are instead the names of the young couple who feature prominently in this segment of the film. The tribe filmed by Hodgkinson is possibly the Puroiks, who are located in Arunachal Pradesh, a mountainous state that borders Assam. David Pertin describes the Puroiks as being forest-dwelling hunters (Pertin, 2005, 371). Amrendra Kumar Thakur states that their 'habitations are widely dispersed among the hills and not easily accessible' (Thakur, 2003, 224). Writing in 2003, Thakur notes that 'While other major tribes of the state have made rapid strides in education and economic pursuit, the Puroiks have remained relegated to the solitude of hills and mountains among the birds and animals' (Thakur, 2003, 224).

### Analysis

Although it is an amateur film, *The Changing East – India Part 1* has a clear sense of structure. It begins with a trope familiar from professional documentaries of the Empire: the scene is set and the learned authority of the filmmaker is established by commencing with images of maps of the area that is about to be surveyed. The film then progresses circularly, opening with and then later returning to footage of the military tattoo at Government House, before closing with images of Delhi at the time of independence. Nevertheless, as it is now not possible to experience the film with the accompaniment of Hodgkinson's *viva voce* commentary, some aspects of its design can be more readily grasped than others

It is apparent that Hodgkinson wishes to provide a document that outlines something of the political changes taking place in India. He takes care to provide portraits of the key players in these events. Mountbatten and Nehru are prominently featured; there is also footage of Jivatram Kripalani, the President of the Indian National Congress at the time of the handover; and at the gathering of the new government's first cabinet, he is careful to single out Abul Kalam Asad, the Muslim Minister of Education, and Baldev Singh, the Sikh Minister of Defence. This outlining of leaders who represent India's different faiths provides an echo of Hodgkinson's earlier footage of Indian city life in Calcutta. Here, as 'The Changing East' pamphlet states, he is careful to record the 'peoples of India . . . Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and others'.

What is less easy to determine is whether there is any intended meaning in the juxtapositions that this film provides. Its longest sequences are of the mountain people and of the military tattoo. Here

there are correspondences as well as contrasts. The 'primitive' nature of the Puroiks can be set against the urbanity of the Delhi ceremonials, and the 'world's smallest community' can be contrasted with the grandeur of the military parade. However, what can also be seen is that both segments show tribal displays. The Puroiks and the British and Indian military forces are both shown in their tribal costumes; they are both shown bearing weapons; and they are both shown operating to a routine order. Moreover, both segments of film focus primarily on a single family: Pingling and Pinchio (if they are so named) in the Puroik section; the Mountbattens in Delhi. The use of colour film provides another bridge between these two worlds. While in the jungle, Hodgkinson is drawn to the vibrant tones of the wild flora; at Government House he provides an extensive record of the colourful flowerbeds. However, it would be unwise to surmise too many conclusions about these correspondences, particularly as the footage of the Puroiks was originally filmed for a different project.

It is similarly tempting to analyse the fact that, at the time of the handover in Delhi, Hodgkinson is preoccupied with the Mountbattens and with military ceremonials, showing greater concern for what is coming to an end, rather than with what is taking shape. It could be argued that this is indicative of the biases of British filmmakers, focusing on the rulers rather than the ruled. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that this was Hodgkinson's own world that he was recording; as a reminder of this fact, his wife Ditty can be seen among the guests at Government House.

Given the film's title, it is interesting to consider which of the people that it features are undergoing the greatest degree of change. In films where primitive tribes and colonial powers are shown side-by-side, it usually follows that it is the tribe's way of life that is under threat. However, in this film, it is the westerners, the representatives of modernity, whose world is coming to an end. The film depicts the first stage of the Mountbatten's step down from power in India; life for the mountain tribe, in contrast, underwent no significant change following independence. Similarly, it can be expected that the 'ordinary' people, witnessed in the street scenes in Calcutta, would not encounter the same degree of change as did the retiring colonial authorities, or the Indian politicians who are shown taking their place. This is not to say that it is only those with power who are shown encountering transformation: the film records some of the final occasions at which the domestic staff and the Indian military forces at Government House would be put on display as the servants of foreign rulers.

**Richard Osborne (July 2010)**



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- Ziegler, Philip, *Mountbatten: The Official Biography* (London: Collins, 1985).

MGH 6251

FILM NUMBER

FILM TITLE:

**the CHANGING EAST- INDIA [PART 2]**

[COLONEL HODGKINSON AMATEUR FILM] [Series]

PRODUCTION DATE:

1952

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

### **SHORT SUMMARY:**

Part two of two (the first part is MGH 6250).

This film is possibly the second part of "The Changing East - India". It shows disturbing scenes of the refugees in Kashmir/Northwest India, at the time of the partition in 1947. The film also shows Gandhi's funeral in 1948, and Lord and Lady Mountbatten leaving Government House, New Delhi.

### **FULL SUMMARY:**

A British officer stands in front of a wall map of India, titled 'General Situation'. He points to the Northwest region. A breakdown of the region's population is shown 'Population of Punjab 1941. Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Others'. Cuts briefly to scenes of refugees, then back to statistics, then further scenes of refugees. Shots of several men with spears and handmade gun walking towards camera. Back to the map - 'West Punjab - East Punjab Refugee Concentrations', points to city west of Amritsar and then Amritsar.

Close-up of men with guns and weapons. A building on fire. Two Red Cross workers carry a child on a stretcher onto a train. Lady Mountbatten, wearing khaki uniform, steps out of train. Close-up of people squashed onto train. A temple (in Amritsar?) with refugee camp outside. Scenes around the camp – people collecting water. Refugees talking to Government Minister ? (Indian man in pith helmet, round glasses) – he takes notes. Close-ups of malnourished children in the camp. Further scenes showing the devastation and poor conditions of the camp.

Close-up of the map. The officer points out the route of the refugees (?) from Kurukshetra to Ambala to Ludhiana to Moga. Aerial shots of the refugees on the road. Ground shots of the refugees. A milestone shows 'Lahore 158, Ludhiana 37, Khanna 11'. Further shots of the long line of

refugees from the air, and at ground level families and their possessions loaded onto cattle-drawn carts. Close-ups of distressed refugees.

Close-up of Indian officer. Lady Mountbatten, in Red Cross uniform, talking to refugees. Close-up of the officer's lapel covered in flies. Further scenes of Lady Mountbatten talking to officers and aid workers at the camp. Brief shot of milestone, then Lady Mountbatten again, but now wearing headscarf. Aerial shots of refugees on the road. Refugees on train at station, some in 'beds' on the roof. Sign at station reads 'Ambala'. Further scenes of refugees at the station, then more aerial shots. Scenes of long line of refugees on the road, families sitting on carts. Scenes around the camp, a sick man lying on the floor. A woman cooking on the floor, a man holds a small child outside makeshift shelters.

Street scene – people outside a row of shops. Shop sign reads 'Universal Publishing Co., publishers, booksellers, Esplanade Rd, Delhi'. More street scenes, people with bicycles. Close-up of a bicycle shop sign. Men on the street looking through books outside bookshop. A man hands out books to men on the street.

Close-up of Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel speaking at Gandhi's funeral, the day after his death – Rajghat, New Delhi, India (31 January 1948). A bronze bust of Gandhi with floral garlands in front of him. Close-up of picture of Gandhi and a flag on a shrine.

An Indian man spinning yarn. At the shrine, Indian soldiers hold back a crowd of mourners. Mourners file out of 'marquee' where Gandhi's ashes are. Crowds in the street (flags and bunting). A procession of mourners, some carrying burning torches, and military. Cut to building on fire. Cut back to Gandhi's funeral – an area covered with red, yellow and white floral garlands. Mourners sit around. Close-up of Indian woman talking and praying into microphone. A little boy prays at a shrine. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel addresses the crowd. Some of the crowd slow-handclaps.

Gandhi's ashes (in an urn) at a train window, the train is decorated with Indian flag. Crowds at the station. The urn is covered with garlands. Scenes at the station of people touching and kissing the urn. The urn is carried through the streets and a man holds it over his head. Further scenes of mourners. Close-up of a leaf with an Indian flag and portrait of Gandhi painted on it. Brief close-up of Patel, Gandhi's bust in front of him.

Close-up of man spinning yarn. Close-up of small children (dressed in 'Anglo' clothes) in school. The teacher shows pictures from a 'Nursery Rhymes' books. Scenes of the children playing and buying sweets from a street vendor. Shots of older girls eating. A British man talks to the children gathered around, when they disperse Lady Mountbatten can be seen amongst them. Close-up of an Indian man and woman (teachers?). Close-up of a British man (headmaster?) and two children, they walk towards the camera.

Government House, New Delhi. Officers gathered on the steps outside, on red carpet. Lord Mountbatten descends steps and inspects troops in the grounds. Close-up of Royal Scots Fusiliers guard wearing bearskin hat and drummers. Scenes of troops on parade. Close-up of a drum-major. Lord Mountbatten and two officers return to their seats. The parade continues. The Governor General's Bodyguards (mounted Sikhs in red tunics). Group shot on steps, Lord Mountbatten salutes.

Three servants in Government House with gold-ware. Close-up of the gold dish with the Mounbatten (?) coat of arms. Long-shot of dining table in Government House [incorrect speed]. Lord Mountbatten unveils gold-ware, from behind Union Jack and Indian flag. Exterior shot of Government House with red carpet on steps. The Governor General's Bodyguards lined up at base of steps. A shot of a horse-drawn carriage. The Mountbattens descend the steps (followed by one of their daughters? Pamela or Patricia?). Shot of a small boy in military uniform walking away from the carriage. Cut to scene of Lord and Lady Mountbatten shaking hands with cabinet members (?) at airport (?). Close-up of carriage and coat of arms. Cut back to Lord and Lady Mountbatten shaking hands with people including Indira Gandhi (?). Also visible behind is Pamela or Patricia (?) Mountbatten. Long-shot of Nehru, Gandhi (?) [**wrong: it is Chakravarti Rajagopalachari**] and two others on the steps of Government House. Brief shot of crowds on the street. The Mountbattens leave Government House in the carriage, escorted by their mounted guards, and watched by crowds and press photographers. Shots of crowds in the street.

In the gardens of Government House, two of the Governor General's Bodyguards walk towards the camera. Gandhi [**Chakravarti Rajagopalachari**], accompanied by bodyguards. Gandhi [**Chakravarti Rajagopalachari**] and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel meet. Brief shot of Nehru. People are introduced to Gandhi [**Chakravarti Rajagopalachari**] and Patel (one man shows Gandhi his ciné camera), including Royal Air Force officers, clergymen, Indian Army officers and United Nations

representatives. Shots of Nehru and Patel talking. Shot of an Indian officer. A brief shot of others in Government House gardens.

Men scatter white petals on a shrine to Gandhi. A man reads from a piece of paper into a microphone. Close-up of the picture of Gandhi on the shrine. Shot of the crowd hanging their heads in prayer, women dressed in white. A man (Nehru?) addresses the crowd. Very brief shot of Kripalani at railway station. Very brief shot of paddy fields. Close-up of a man with two baskets of fruit. Shot of a malnourished child (as previously). Refugees with cattle and carts. Aerial views of refugees. Indian schoolchildren (as previously).

Handpainted illustration of train of people disappearing into the distant mountains - "The End".

#### NOTES:

Allocated Title taken from Hodgkinson's original can markings.

Date: refers to stock dates on Kodachrome [Note - Production date is probably a few years later than some early footage - LJT]

Technical: film marked "original"

This film probably formed the second part of "The Changing East" programme of feature films which Hodgkinson made, presented and narrated at venues around Britain. See printed programme in Acquisition File.

Summary: subject related to Partition of India in August 1947.

#### PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Hodgkinson, Frank Outram (Lieutenant-Colonel): cameraman

#### ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

#### FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/16/A

#### NUMBER OF REELS:

1

#### RUNNING TIME:

33 mins

#### BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

Colour

#### SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

## LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

None

## LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

None

## LANGUAGE OF SUBTTILES:

None

**Context**

‘The Changing East’ is a series of three feature-length films created by Lieutenant Colonel Frank Outram Hodgkinson. In the separate films he addresses ‘Burma and Siam’, ‘India’ and ‘Kashmir’, outlining the various transformations taking place in these countries in the period following the Second World War. A pamphlet produced to accompany screenings of ‘The Changing East’ describes Hodgkinson as being a ‘British film producer and writer’ who ‘knows the East from long years of residence and professional film making’. It adds that ‘During the war he commanded a British Film Unit under Lord Louis Mountbatten’, indicating that he was in charge of the film unit that formed part of Mountbatten’s South East Asia Command (SEAC). The material included in ‘The Changing East’ was not shot for official military purposes; it is Hodgkinson’s own, amateur colour footage. The films were shown in a variety of venues around Britain in the late 1940s and early 1950s: theatres, factories, the House of Commons, and finally ‘a Command Performance at Buckingham Palace’.

The second part of Hodgkinson’s Indian film covers some major historical events: the partition of India; the funeral of Mahatma Gandhi; and the departure of Lord Mountbatten as India’s Governor-General. During the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 it was the states of Punjab in the west of India and Bengal in the East that suffered the worst effects. These states were both composed of people of differing religious beliefs. In both instances boundary lines were drawn through the states, resulting in communal violence and massive population movement. It has been estimated that up to 12.5 million crossed the new borders; the number of people killed in the violence has been variously estimated at between several hundred thousand and a million (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2006, 221-22).

On 30 January 1948, Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist, murdered Gandhi. At his trial, Godse defended his actions on the grounds that Gandhi had been guilty of a pro-Muslim policy and that he had propagated ‘blunder after blunder, failure after failure, disaster after disaster’ (‘Nathuram Godse’). In accordance with Hindu custom Gandhi was cremated within 24 hours of his death. The

location of his cremation, on the banks of river Yamuna in Delhi, was soon commemorated with the Rāj Ghāt memorial. His ashes were separated into several urns that were sent throughout India for further memorial services.

As the last Viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten was charged with overseeing the transfer of power to the independent countries of India and Pakistan. The delay in announcing the final boundary lines of partition until 18 August 1947 – three days after the date of Indian independence and four days after Pakistan's independence – has drawn criticism (Ziegler, 1985, 418-19). Although it is debatable that revealing the boundaries at an earlier time would have prevented the violence and the population movement, disclosing them after independence meant that the British government was absolved from having to solve these problems (Wolpert, 2006). Following independence, Mountbatten remained in India as Governor-General, an appointment that drew accusations of bias from Pakistani political leaders. He was the chair of an Emergency Committee that was convened to help deal with the problems caused by partition. Mountbatten's wife, Edwina, was also involved in this work, and has been commended for the tours that she made of refugee camps (Morgan, 1991, 417-18). Mountbatten retired as Governor-General on 21 June 1948, to be replaced by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, a former leader of the Indian National Congress. Mountbatten's departure brought forth crowds of Indians to the streets of Delhi.

### **Analysis**

Although part two of *The Changing East - India* would have been shown immediately after the first part of the film, it can be seen to represent a clear break, both in terms of style and subject matter. At times there are echoes of the first half of the film, but these reminders have the effects of differentiating the two halves of the film as well as bringing them together.

The first of these devices is the use of maps. Where the first part of *The Changing East – India* is introduced with maps that detail India's position in relation to the rest of the world, part two is introduced with maps that focus solely on India and which are used to detail the issues caused by partition. This reflects a difference in approach between the two halves of the film: where the first part draws on a diverse range of locations (Delhi, Calcutta, Arunachal Pradesh) to provide an overview of India at the time of independence, part two details specific events that happened in the wake of partition. It comes across like a sequence of reports, showing in order some of the major news stories of 1947 and 1948.

As a reporter, Hodgkinson gains access to the important locations and to the leading players. His footage of the effects of partition on the Punjab captures both the scale of the events (he uses long shots filmed aerially and on the ground to capture the large convoys of displaced people), and their horror (the footage of starving children and sick adults at the makeshift camps is unflinchingly graphic). He is close enough to Lady Mountbatten during one of her camp visits to show her interaction with the refugees and the people who are working to give them aid, and is also close enough to record the fact that flies that have descended upon her and all those who have gathered around her. Hodgkinson gains a similar level of access in his footage of the memorial events for Gandhi. He films close-ups of Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai as he delivers an oration at the funeral held the day after his death; he is in amongst the principal mourners who surround the Rāj Ghāt at Delhi; and he is on the platform of a train station as an urn bearing some of Gandhi's ashes is displayed to mourners.

The final event that Hodgkinson gains privileged access to in part two of *The Changing East - India* is the departure of Mountbatten as Governor-General. As well as being chronologically correct, the positioning of this event at the film's conclusion provides structural and thematic echoes with part one of the film. It could also have been placed here to illustrate significant differences. Part one of *The Changing East – India* begins with a military tattoo, held at Government House while Mountbatten was still Viceroy. The scenes of his departure that close part two begin with the final military ceremony that Mountbatten experienced at Government House. At the first ceremony he is the guest of honour and the events are performed for him; in this final ceremony he is the principal participant and is shown being paraded in front of the Indian public. Part one of *The Changing East – India* closes with reprised footage of the military tattoo, followed by scenes of a garden party held at Government House over which Mountbatten presides as host. In part two, Mountbatten's parade is followed by footage of another Government House garden party; however this time there is a new host: Chakravarti Rajagopalachari.

**Richard Osborne (July 2010)**

### **Works cited**

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**CHILDREN OF THE JUNGLE**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1332>

Title Ref: Sift 22556

Director:

Prod. Country: IN

Year: 1939

1st Release: 1939

Prodn. Company: Times of India

Release Country:

Format: 16

Run Time (Mins): 20

Length: 762 Feet 232 Metres

Colour Code: B

Colour System:

Sound System: SOUN

Language: ENG

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

**Credits:**

Producer JEPSON, Stanley

Production Company Times of India

**Additional credits**

Written by JEPSON, Stanley

Produced by JEPSON, Stanley

Cinematography by BARTLEY, Marcus

Edited by BADAMI, Sarvattam

Synchronized by BADAMI, Sarvattam

**Synopsis**

INTEREST. Credits (49), hut on stilts from which tribesmen keep guard over their crops (82), dead neelgai shot by the tribesman (87), close-up of a Gond tribesman with axe and spear (92), items such as opium, amulet, pipes which the tribesman carries in his loin cloth (112), tribesmen climb trees for fruit and dig up edible roots from the ground (143), fire is obtained by rubbing two bamboo sticks

together (169), fishing with spears (174), members of the Bhil tribe firing arrows (191), a missing village calf is found dead, partly eaten by a panther, the villagers stalk the panther and kill it with arrows, its body is then carried to the village (253), elephant riding, elephants used to clear bushland (293), tribesmen refresh themselves with river water (302), bullock carts (322), tribesmen help get the car belonging to the expedition over sand and river (345), village women with their children, villagers listen to a radio (382), a Bhil wedding ceremony – the bride sits in the lap of the groom’s father, the dowry is exchanged, the best man is rubbed with soot, the bridegroom is rubbed with turmeric whilst the bride is rubbed with a dye, on the wedding day, the bridegroom arrives on horseback, coins are dropped for luck, the bride’s friends pelt the groom with fruit in mock protest at him taking the bride away. During the ceremony, the bride and groom are held by their wrists, the bride and groom then play games, musicians play, dancing by all the villagers (668), map showing the area around Bombay where the tribes live (678), women carrying water pots on their heads (702), fishing in the river (711), milling corn (721), divorce ceremony – the woman publicly tears off a piece of her sari, the man tears off the end of his turban (749), tribesmen hunting (763 ft).

### Context

*Children of the Jungle* was produced in 1939 by the film division of the British-owned *Times of India* newspaper. The cinematography is by Marcus Bartley, who is credited as ‘newsreel cameraman’ for the paper, and he would later go on to achieve recognition for his camerawork on such Indian feature films *Swarga Seema* (1945) (‘Marcus Bartley’). The film was written and produced by Stanley Jepson, editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, one of the newspaper’s sister publications. Jepson was one of the prime movers of Bombay’s first film club, the Amateur Cine Society, founded in 1937 (Mazumder). The film was edited by Sarvattam Badami, director of over 30 films for Sagar Movietone, the distributors of the first talking pictures in India (‘The Firsts of Indian Cinema’). Badami would later play a leading role in setting up the newsreel section of the film division for the first government of independent India (Vittal, 2007, 75).

The film is concerned with the practices of the various forest tribes of central India. Its first half focuses primarily on the hunting activities of the Gond people, who constitute the largest of central India’s tribes. The second half features some elements of the wedding rituals undertaken by the Bhil tribe (for comprehensive accounts of these rituals see Sirshalkar, 2004, 296-304; Koppers and Jungblut, 1946, 5-33). The film also recounts some of the history of the Bhils, noting that during the early nineteenth century they were ‘the desperados and marauding bandits of Khandesh’. It claims

that they were ‘pacified’ by General James Outram, who founded the Khandesh Bhil Corps in 1825 (for further details see Russell, 2009, 375).

In an illuminating article Ajay Skaria discusses the ways in which colonial officials distinguished between what they viewed as the ‘castes’ and the ‘tribes’ of India (Skaria, 1997, 726-45). He states that it was only in the 1840s that people such as the Bhils were termed as being ‘aboriginal, forest, or hill tribes’ (Skaria, 1997, 728). They were described as fairly low on the evolutionary scale and as animal-like and primitive, a distinction that was accounted for by their dependence on hunting (ignoring the fact that large sections of these tribes lived by settled agriculture). The British also frequently viewed tribal people as being noble, independent, masculine and loyal. Skaria links these opinions to the western tradition of the noble savage, and further notes that they set up an opposition with Hindu castes, who in comparison were regarded as wily and feminised. The tribes were portrayed as immature, and thus requiring the protection of gentlemen British officials, such as Outram. Skaria states that ‘British rule in India was always, of course, represented as paternalistic. But with a people so strongly perceived as backward, childlike, and noble, colonial paternalism somersaulted into its own with a flourish’ (Skaria, 1997, 736).

### **Analysis**

One of the ambitions of *Children of the Jungle* is to provide a pioneering anthropological study. An early title card states that ‘This film is the first attempt at intimate glimpses of the aboriginal jungle tribes of Central India’, while a later one claims that ‘These customs filmed for the first time are quite orthodox and correct in detail’. The ‘valuable assistance’ of local forest officers is also underlined. The film is structured like a travelogue, giving the impression that it casually recounts the film crew’s expedition among the jungle people. To that end the film’s authenticity is aided by its occasional amateurism. There is no attempt to sequence the most interesting scenes first; some scenes are poorly lit; others are crudely edited; and the commentary occasionally stumbles. Moreover, the crew allow themselves to enter the frame. The progress of their car is shown on film and we see them introducing the locals to the wonders of radio (this occurs during a curious segment that features the forest officers awarding prizes – including empty beer bottles – to the most beautiful villagers).

The viewer also gets a sense of the filmmakers’ activities behind the camera. This film has many sequences that have been staged for the camera. These include posed ethnographical portraits (framed with head-and-shoulders shots which are filmed both face-on and in profile); activities

performed by the locals for the camera (a display of fire-making; a scene in which a Gond hunter discloses the possessions that he carries with him); and orchestrated narrative sequences (a panther hunt; the Bhil wedding). These latter sequences are indicative of the more professional approaches of the filmmakers. Several of the filmed events could not have occurred in real time. Scenes are shot from a variety of positions (close-ups, distance shots, reaction shots) thus disclosing the re-framing and repositioning of *Children of the Jungle's* lone camera. In addition, some scenes are filmed from 'unnatural' positions (filming face-on to a team of archers who are supposedly aiming at a panther), and others from privileged ones (during some of the wedding scenes the cameraman/viewer is granted an omniscient viewpoint). Each of these elements reveals a degree of intervention by the filmmakers.

In his commentary Jepson frequently adopts a jocular tone, which is sometimes sexual ('Oh mother Eve - what could poor Adam do about that?') and sometimes sexist ('The women are adept at doing two or three things at once; most ladies are!). He freely offers his own opinions ('these ceremonies may seem ludicrous') and on occasion guesses at the meaning of the activities he witnesses (the ritual of rubbing the prospective groom's face with turmeric is described as being 'just to keep him from feeling cold and backing out of it *probably*'). He makes use of western comparisons to help convey the activities that are on display, but does so in a manner that reinforces a divide: fire-making is described as a 'little game – better than yo-yo' and we learn that 'Mr Ford will never displace the bullock cart from India'. Moreover, the locals are never personalised; it is only General Outram who is referred to by name.

The presumptions of the filmmakers become readily apparent. An opening title card excuses their use of the word 'children' by stating that Sanskrit literature refers to the jungle tribes as the 'children of the forest'. Much of the film strives to show how at one with nature these people are: the Gonds are described as being 'like their friends the animals' and they are shown climbing trees 'like monkeys'. The people are also shown as being hunters, just like the animals around them. For the filmmakers, these people are also children due to their lack of development. The opening title card refers to the fact that they have 'advanced but little' and the film focuses on what it perceives to be the people's more humorous and playful practices (in particular when covering the wedding formalities). The film concludes by describing the people as 'sturdy, simple, loyal, likeable'. It is also at pains to point out that the tribes are different to India's castes: a title card states that 'it must not be supposed that these jungle tribes [...] are in any way typical of the millions who constitute the rural population of India'.

The film's distortions do not negate the fact that it contains much valuable footage. It could even be said to add another layer of interest. It is the gaps in this film – between its professionalism and amateurism, and between its intentions and unwitting disclosures – that makes it as ripe for an anthropological study of its makers as it is of the forest tribes of India.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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**CORONATION DURBAR AT DELHI**

Web Address <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1956>

Title Ref:

Director:

Prod. Country: GB

Year: 29/12/1902

Production Company: Paul's Animatograph Works

Release Date: 1903

Format: 35

Length: 110 Feet 34 Metres

Colour Code: B

Sound System: SLNT

Credits:

Production Company Paul's Animatograph Works

Producer Paul, R. W.

*Synopsis*

No titles. View over heads of specators of review of troops including Indian lancers (19). Vice-regal escort of infantry, Indian cavalry and Indian army pipe bands, with landaus conveying the Viceroy's party, including Prince Arthur of Connaught, Louisa, Duchess of Connaught, Lord Curzon, and Countess Curzon. The entourage pass along a roadway lined with British troops in what seems to be open countryside (90). Two European women mounted on caparisoned elephant; their Indian attendants sit behind them. A large group of Indians stand behind. They are joined by another elephant (101ft). Incomplete (110ft).

*Context*

'Durbar' is a Persian term that was adopted in India to refer to a ruler's court. It could be used to refer to a feudal state council or to a ceremonial gathering. It was this latter sense that was taken up by the British Raj when, during the 'high noon' of Empire, three imperial Durbars were held in Delhi, each marking royal occasions. The first, held in 1877, marked the proclamation of Queen Victoria as Queen Empress of India. The last, held in 1911, marked the coronation of King George V. This film covers the 1902-03 Durbar, which marked the coronation of King Edward VII.

The 1902-03 Durbar was monumental in scale. The events, which lasted ten days, included set-piece ceremonials, competitions in various arts, a review of over 34,000 troops, an investiture, a state ball, and a reception for the Indian princes. The Durbar entailed the construction of an amphitheatre, eleven miles of road, seven miles of railway and an electrical plant (Bottomore, 1995, 497).

Organised by Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, the 1902-03 Durbar had specific aims. Curzon believed that ritual could lay 'the real foundation stones of the stable fabric of Her Majesty's Indian Empire' (Trevithick, 1990, 567). He wished both to 'impress the outside world with British power and influence in India', and to show 'Britons themselves the nature of the Empire and its responsibilities' (Bottomore, 1995, 496). Furthermore, in providing an occasion during which the disparate peoples of India could meet one another, the event would deliver 'incalculable advantage both to the participants and to the administration which they serve' (*The Times*, 30 September 1902, 5). Curzon believed that the benefits of these aims would justify 'an expense greatly in excess of any we are likely to incur' (Trevithick, 1990, 567).

Central to Curzon's plans was the presence of royalty at the Delhi Durbar. He was therefore disappointed that Edward VII did not appear in person, and that the King's brother, the Duke of Connaught, was sent in his place. *The Times*, nevertheless, believed that the Duke's attendance had the required effect. They reported that 'the presence of the King-Emperor's official representative invested the celebrations with an added solemnity and moral cogency they could otherwise never have possessed' (*The Times*, 13 January 1903, 3). Elsewhere, the newspaper was convinced of the overall triumph of the occasion: 'The Delhi Durbar is a splendid proof that British rule in India has not only been successful, but has become popular' (*The Times*, 30 December 1902, 7). The paper believed that 'Nothing in the whole history of our Empire in the East is likely to make as great impression on our Indian fellow-subjects than the splendid demonstration that is now in progress at Delhi' (*The Times*, 30 December 1902, 7).

The Indian press was less convinced. Rather than impressing the local population, it was instead believed that the ceremonial merely reflected Curzon's own 'inordinate love of pomp and show' ('Gujarati', quoted in Trevithick, 1990, 569). In India the Coronation Durbar was nicknamed 'the Curzonization Durbar' (Cory, 2002). One Bengali editorialist wrote that 'one cannot help laughing at British notions of liberality.' ('Kal', quoted in Trevithick, 1990, 569), and elsewhere the expense of the affair was decried (Trevithick, 1990, 569).



The various films that were made of the 1902-03 Durbar achieved their greatest success abroad. Stephen Bottomore has argued that 'Though the event took place in India, most of the effort of filming it and most of the exhibition outlets and audiences interest in the films came from the West' (Bottomore, 1995, 512).

*Coronation Durbar at Delhi* is one of four films made of the events made by the British company Paul's Animatograph Works (Bottomore, 1995, 499). This company was founded in 1897 by R. W. Paul, 'the leading pioneer of British film' (McKernan, 2009). Although it began by making short one-off actualities, Paul's company soon experimented with longer film forms, including the combination of actualities into specific film programmes.

#### *Analysis*

Although the 1902-03 Delhi Durbar was held only seven years after the Lumière Brothers' first film screenings it is notable that an awareness of film had already seeped into the creation and perception of such public events. On the one hand, the Durbar was filmed by 'several companies and individuals' (Bottomore, 1995, 512). On the other hand, the events themselves were talked of as having a filmic quality. Curzon himself described those taking part in the pageant as 'actors' (Bottomore, 1995, 508). Reporting on the event for the *Times of India* in 1903, Lovat Fraser stated:

The mind had become blurred by so many splendid spectacles unveiled in rapid succession. It was as though a cinematograph had been at work upon a novel principle, revealing not one continuous picture, but a whirling variety of scenes, wherein only the central figures remained the same. For a whole year India had been preparing for the great event. For months beforehand people talked of little else. As the appointed days grew near the tension grew to straining point. Then, suddenly, 'Click, click, click!' Almost before you realised it, the machine was in motion, the panorama was being unfolded before your eyes. There was one sharp, quick rush of dazzling scenes, and then it was over, leaving you breathless, astonished, exhausted (Bottomore, 1995, 511)

This awareness of the Durbar's cinematographic qualities may be partially attributed to the nature of the event itself. Stephen Bottomore has pointed out that:

...processions were in many ways the ideal fare for the early film medium, partly because they often resulted in films with strong movement filling the frame. With limited ability to edit different shots together, such a film with a 'lively' or 'animated' appearance had a strong appeal in the early days. Also, processions, taking place along a predetermined route, were relatively easy to film (Bottomore, 1995, 507).

Bearing all of this in mind, the footage featured in *Coronation Durbar at Delhi* can seem somewhat disappointing. This film, which lasts under two minutes, features three scenes. In describing its contents there is not much to expand upon the entry made in *Paul Catalogue* of June 1903, which states 'Shows a ground-level shot of procession, another shot of troops passing, and a very brief shot of two European ladies in a howdah' (Bottomore, 1995, 512).

The film enables us to gain some measure of the size of the crowds, but it is not possible to gauge the reaction among the Indian onlookers (although they do run over excitedly to the royal party in the second scene, and also run alongside the carriage). Similarly, the footage features both British and Indian troops, but not in enough detail to be able to pick up their responses to the Durbar. What is most interesting here, perhaps, is that the British troops who are lining the procession are at relative ease for the passage of the Indian soldiers, but stand to attention for the arrival of the royal carriage. It should be noted, however, that the procession has gathered pace by the time the royal coach arrives.

It is also clear that the cinematic consciousness has only gone so far. These events are *not* staged for this camera. The cameraman does not gain particularly advantageous viewing points and the footage is also badly cropped. The opening section is not focused on any one thing in particular. We see various troops criss-crossing in front of one another, without knowing which of them we should be looking at. This is in part due to the fact that the camera cannot be panned or refocused. In the second scene – of the parade – the cameraman gains a better position; however, he does not witness the formal part of the procession, riders heading in the opposite direction block his view, and the outriders accompanying the royal party do not fit into the frame. The editing throughout is quite random, perhaps dictated by the actual footage that has been captured. The scene of the elephant is particularly unfocused. It both begins and ends suddenly. The elephant is not in the frame of the picture at the start of the segment and, as it moves on, we lose our sight of the top of the howdah.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that *Coronation Durbar at Delhi* and other films of the events were distributed widely. Moreover, R. W. Paul modestly described this actuality as being 'the first and best film of the event'. Any discrepancies between the Durbar being described as 'cinematic' and the film that is on display here should not be regarded as any failing on the behalf of Paul's Animatograph Works; instead they help us to understand how the correspondences between film and reality have altered over time.

Richard Osborne (June 2009)

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Film Number	MWY 58
Film Title	<b>CORONATION OF MAHARAJAH OF MANIPUR</b> [INDIAN ARMY OPERATIONS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR] [Allocated series]
Web Address	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6510">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6510</a>
Production Date	1944-12-04
Production Country	India
Production Sponsor	Public Relations Directorate, India
Production Company	Indian Public Relations Film Unit

Bodh Chandra Singh, Maharajah of Manipur, is crowned in a traditional ceremony at Imphal.

Outside a large, stately building (a palace?) a crowd of attendees of the coronation, many of them in white. A few people in British military dress can be seen, as can a number of photographers. A number of elephants also stand outside the building. A group emerges and descends the steps; a number of people prostrate themselves as they approach. The royal procession crosses a steel road bridge; some are barechested but wear elaborate headdress, others all in white with white turbans. Some carry ornate staffs (?). Some may be Gurkhas. Apparently all are men, and behind them follow two elephants and then a more general throng. Mounted escorts at head of the procession, with people and the elephants (three abreast) following. At a sacred site a woman stands up and adjusts her clothing. A priest apparently going into a trance; he convulses and another man appears to wave a wettened bunch of leaves over him.

Pan of the crowd. Crowd beginning to move off again; a ladder is set against the side of a waiting elephant. Alternative angles (shot by Jemadar Singh?) shows the Maharajah in traditional dress, attended by warriors, descending the steps. Close-up. He mounts an elephant. Seated, he lights a cigarette and casts aside his match. The three elephants move off. Procession passing with palace

behind. A guard of honour presents arms as the elephants approach. Elephants and crowd passing. Children in front of the procession. More of the procession. 'Wise women' in white. Close-up of a musician playing some kind of instrument which looks like two large sea shells. People watching proceedings, including a British (?) man. The elephants halt and the Maharajah dismounts. Maharajah standing with warriors. Close-up Maharajah. Nissen hut with Gurkha troops outside. Seated crowd. Man, in white (priest?), holding a tall and decorative object (a chime of some sort?). Musicians with stringed instruments with bows and bells. Playing same.

Production Credits	Honawar, P H (Lieutenant): cameraman Singh, G (Jemadar): cameraman
Access Conditions	IWM
Film/Video Format	35mm
Number of Reels	1
Length	614 ft
Running Time	7 mins
Black & White/Colour	B&W
Silent/Sound	Silent
PDF	MW_58.pdf
Theme	Indian Army 1939-1945
Context Date	Second World War
Status of Film	1

Status of Record	2
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Status of Indexes	3
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### Context

This film covers the coronation of Bodh Chandra Singh as Maharajah of Manipur, which took place on 1 December 1944. Bodh Chandra Singh had come to the throne three years earlier but the War had made it impossible for full coronation ceremonies to take place. Manipur borders Burma, and had been targeted by Japanese troops following their capture of Burmese territory in 1942. Imphal, Manipur's capital, along with Kohima in neighbouring Nagaland, suffered the only incursions of Japanese troops into mainland Indian territory during the Second World War. The Japanese began their advance towards both towns in March 1944, commencing fierce combat in each area. Allied forces proved victorious in Kohima in May 1944, and then advanced towards Imphal, which was relieved on 22 June 1944 (Jackson, 2006, 397-98). These victories were important turning points in the Allied campaign to reclaim Burma from the Japanese; by December 1944 Japanese troops had withdrawn deep into the country.

It was the decision of the Maiba, the wise women of Manipur, that the first of December was a propitious day for the coronation ceremony to take place (Honowar). According to *Life* magazine, which covered the event, 'The British encouraged Manipur to go all out in ceremonies for the coronation' (*Life*, 30 April 1945, 75). Manipur's royal family claims descent from the Golden Snake (*Life*, 30 April 1945, 75), and the ceremonials included a visit to the old coronation hall – bombed during the fighting for Imphal – where rituals were performed for the snake goddess. According to town elders this was the first time that such a ceremony had been celebrated in 40 years (Honawar).

Manipur is a physically isolated region, bordered from the rest of India by high mountains. It came under British rule as a princely state in 1891, the last kingdom to be incorporated into British India. Bodh Chandra Singh supported the Allied cause during the War, but following Indian independence he urged unity in his state, following what he considered to be the 'dulling effect' of British control (Singh, 1948, 311). In 1948 he declared Manipur to be a sovereign state, with its own democratically elected government. This situation was to last for less than a year: in October 1949, Bodh Chandra Singh agreed to the accession of Manipur to the republic of India. However, there remains a separatist movement in the state which campaigns for sovereignty.

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Lieutenant Honawar and Jemadar Singh shot this film for the Indian Army's Public Relations Film Unit. This unit, based at Tollygunge, Calcutta, had been set up during the War by the British cameraman Bryan Langley (Gladstone). Langley trained Indian soldiers as cameramen, and he later recalled his satisfaction in teaching 'four or five of those lads' who went on to film military operations in India and Burma (Langley, 1987). The footage taken by this unit was used internally for Indian Army purposes. Some of the footage would also be edited into films that received a wider distribution, both in India and, via the Ministry of Information, abroad (for example, *Burma Victory* (1945), and *Johnny Gurkha* (1945)).

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### Analysis

Just as the British authorities encouraged Manipur to go all out in the ceremonials for the coronation, this film goes all out to capture those events. This is evidenced by the range of the events covered: the film provides a chronological account of the ceremonies, capturing the procession to the site of the coronation hall, the rituals for the snake goddess, and the return of the procession to the royal palace. It is also evidenced by the presence of two cameramen employed to cover this story. The cameramen deliberately filmed from different angles; in his dope sheets Lieutenant Honawar notes that Jemadar Singh specialised in shots of 'the crowd, the Maharja and other interesting figures like musicians, wise women etc.' (Honawar). Their footage has been edited together for this final film, but otherwise does not appear to have been cut. As such, certain sections of the action are duplicated and there are on occasion unexpected sections of footage (a segment showing Nissen huts, for example).

The film's long shots reveal something of the military intrusion into civilian life. British military personnel can be seen witnessing the procession at certain stages of the route, and military vehicles can be glimpsed in the background of some of these scenes. Moreover, scattered throughout the crowds, and occasionally seen standing guard, are a number of Indians wearing contemporary military uniform. What the long shots convey most effectively, however, is the scale of events: there are hundreds if not thousands present.

It would appear that one of the main objectives of these coronation ceremonies, and of the film itself, was a display of Indian regal splendour, returning to its full majesty as the tide turned in the War. Consequently, the footage concentrates primarily upon the most traditional and striking aspects of the coronation ceremony. Honawar noted that the celebrations included a cocktail party, to which

General Slim and other army and airforce officers were invited, but this is not featured in the footage. Instead there is the exotic gathering of the ritual for the snake goddess, where a priest can be seen descending into a trance. Singh's close-ups focus upon wrestlers, 'whose costumes go back to the dim recesses of tradition' (*Life*, 30 April 1945, 78), and upon Indian musicians, who are shown blowing on conch shells or playing handcrafted stringed instruments. The mute nature of this film further enhances its 'traditional' representation of the coronation events: *Life* magazine noted that there was also a police band present at the ceremonies, which 'varied' the music played by the Indian musicians with their renditions of 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow', but this band is neither seen nor heard in the film (*Life*, 30 April 1945, 78). The Maharajah is at the centre of this ancient splendour; he is pictured wearing an elaborate headdress and is shown in an elevated position, riding on an elephant's back in a decorated howdah. Nevertheless, he also undercuts the representation of exoticism. He comes across as an aloof figure, and the close-ups capture his westernised habit of chain-smoking branded cigarettes.

**Richard Osborne (April 2010)**

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AYY 141-2

FILM NUMBER

FILM TITLE:

**CYPRUS GOES TO WAR**

[BRITISH ARMY OPERATIONS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR] [Allocated series]

WEB ADDRESS:

<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5462>

PRODUCTION DATE:

6/7/1941 (ca)

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

War Office Film Unit

SHORT SUMMARY:

Mules on Mount Olympus. Scottish soldiers eating at Othello's Tower at Famagusta, Cyprus. Soldiers cheering. Local farmers employing traditional farming methods: yoking of oxen, threshing, winnowing corn. Woman riding a donkey, goats are tied behind for transport to market. Girls washing clothes in mountain stream at foot of Amiandos Asbestos Mine. Recruiting notice "Cyprus Needs You" in English, Turkish and Greek. There is also a poster warning people of the danger of listening to Nazi broadcasts. An innkeeper carries a tray of coffee to a monk in the Orthodox Greek church. Seascape. Copper mine.

Durham Light Infantry in transit camp drawing water, eating, buying lemonade from a local vendor and drawing pay. 20th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery installing 3.7 anti-aircraft guns. 8th Battery on a route march. They direct a Cypriot labour party in digging a gun pit. A signals party tests a heliograph. English soldiers sightseeing at the mosque of San Sofia. A Cyprus Volunteer Force officer having his shoes cleaned.

NOTES:

Remarks: this film incorporates AYY 141-1-2 and AYY 141-2-2 as numbered on the dope sheet.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Langley, Bryan (Lieutenant): cameraman

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

35mm

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

1132 ft

RUNNING TIME:

12 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

### Context

At the outbreak of the Second World War the British military lagged behind the French and the Germans in an understanding of the propaganda value of film. There were no military cameramen in uniform and a ban was placed on civilian newsreel cameramen filming military subjects (Gladstone). The first cameramen appointed by the Army to cover the War were drawn from professional backgrounds in either documentary film or feature film: none of them had previous military experience and they were instead given honorary military ranks (Gladstone).

These men were posted to Public Relations Units at home or overseas where they acted as lone camera operators. Among them was Bryan Langley, who shot the footage for *Cyprus Goes to War* in the summer of 1941. Langley had begun his career in 1927, working as a cameraman for H.B. Parkinson Productions. In the 1930s he worked for British International Pictures at Elstree Studios, where he shot several noted productions, including a number of Alfred Hitchcock films. Following the War he worked as a special effects cameraman at Pinewood. Among the films he worked on in this period are *Piccadilly Incident* (1946), *The Weaker Sex* (1948), *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951), *Reach for the Sky* (1956) and *A Town Like Alice* (1956) ('Donor in Focus: Bryan Langley').

Langley joined the Army Film Unit in 1941. He later recalled being issued with 'a great big revolver' but having no military training ('Bryan Langley: BECTU Interview Part 3'). The War Office informed him that he was better off 'going as a cameraman uninhibited by any military regulations'; consequently he felt free to film military personnel of all ranks ('Bryan Langley: BECTU Interview Part 3'). He was first posted to Africa, followed by stints in Cyprus, the Middle East, and Southeast

Asia. In India he was responsible for setting up the Indian Army's Public Relations film Unit in Tollygunge, Calcutta. He was proud of the fact that several of his Indian students went on to become professional cameramen in India and Burma (see *Coronation of the Maharajah of Manipur* (1944), *British and Indian Troops Liberate Ramree Town* (1945) and *Liberation of Yenangyaung* (1945)).

In April 1941 German troops defeated Allied troops in Greece, and then achieved further success in the Battle of Crete, which lasted from 20 May 1941 to 1 June 1941. Stationed in Cairo, Langley filmed the retreat of Allied troops from Crete. Cyprus was expected to be next in line for an attack, and Langley was sent there to cover events. The island was bombed by the Germans, Italians and the Vichy French, but did not suffer an invasion by Axis Forces. Langley stayed for two months and adopted a policy of 'filming everything' he saw ('Bryan Langley: BECTU Interview Part 3'). Once it was felt that the island was no longer in great danger, he was sent onwards in search of more graphic action, being informed by his employers, 'better luck next time' ('Bryan Langley: BECTU Interview Part 3').

Prior to the fall of Athens, Greece had been Britain's only European ally fighting the Axis powers. As a means of cementing Anglo-Greek solidarity, Sir Michael Palaiet, the British Minister in Athens, had recommended that the British rule of Cyprus be ceded to Greece (Hitchens, 1984, 36). His proposals were overruled by officials in the Foreign Office, who felt that such a move would prevent Turkey adopting a pro-British policy in the War (Hitchens, 1984, 36). Similarly, following the fall of Greece and Crete, the Greek government in exile had requested that it be stationed in Cyprus, but the British government insisted that they instead rule from Egypt, for fear of offending Turkish Cypriots (Hitchens, 1984, 36). The British government also initially banned the flying of the Greek flag on Cyprus, but later issued recruiting posters that used its colours and which urged Cypriots to 'Fight for Greece and Freedom' (Hitchens, 1984, 37). Cypriots enlisted in great numbers: by 1944 over 10,000 of them were serving in the British Army (Jackson, 2006, 133).

### **Analysis**

Bryan Langley's impulse to film a wide variety of subjects while stationed in Cyprus is in evidence in this film. He documents Army preparations for the attack by Axis forces; Cypriots carrying out their daily lives; the interaction between the local people and the Allied troops; and something of the history of the island.

He applies his professional skills to matters of both military and human interest. The construction of a military derrick is covered with attention to detail worthy of an instruction manual. These images of modern military installations contrast strongly with those of the ancient methods of Cypriot agriculture. For example, Langley films a threshing machine constructed by a farmer and his son. This consists merely of an old chair placed on some planks of wood, which the farmer sits on as it is dragged slowly by oxen. The difference with the military footage is not only one of modernity and tradition: Langley also adopts a different approach in the way that he films his subjects. While filming the Cypriots he uses a larger number of close-up shots; he is more interested in filming expressions than he is when depicting Army personnel. Moreover, some of the footage of Cypriots is staged, with action being repeated from different angles for the camera's benefit. It should be noted, however, that Langley appears to have a good rapport with all of his subjects. Both the military and locals appear at ease in his presence and happy to perform for the camera.

Although there is no military engagement in this film, Langley does document the effects of the War upon Cyprus. He films posters, written in English, Greek and Turkish, requesting military volunteers. The one written in English is addressed to Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike, stating generally that 'These Cypriots are fighting to win the World War for freedom and you should help them too'. He also takes note of the wartime economy. The War boosted demands for the island's agriculture but brought much of the mining industry to a standstill (Jackson, 2006, 133).

Correspondingly, Langley covers a great deal of farming activity, but he also films some of the remaining work taking place in the mines. Langley also captures the relationship between the Army and the locals. In another of his staged scenes he depicts a lemonade seller, who pours out drinks for the troops in an extravagant manner. Elsewhere there is evidence of the way in which the military presence boosted the agricultural economy: he films a horse and cart returning to base loaded with local produce.

Finally, in attempting to document as much of Cyprus as possible, Langley films a variety of places of local interest. The film begins with scenes of the Army's base at Othello's Tower, located at Famagusta in Northern Cyprus. Here Langley is careful to record the stone carving of the Venetian lion of St Mark; he then pans up from this carving to reveal the Union Flag flying above it. Later he films at the San Sofia Mosque in Nicosia. Here there is another panned shot, which this time pointedly shows a Muslim minaret.

**Richard Osborne (July 2010)**

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**CYPRUS IS AN ISLAND**

Web Address:	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4511">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4511</a>
Title Ref:	
Director:	KEENE, Ralph
Prod. Country:	GB
Year:	1946
Production Company:	Greenpark Productions / Film Producer's Guild
Release Date:	1946
Format:	35mm
Length:	34 Minutes
Colour Code:	Black and White
Sound System:	Sound
Credits:	
Producer	KEENE, Ralph
Photography	STILL, George
Story	LEE, Laurie
Commentary Writer	LEE, Laurie
Narrator	DYALL, Valentine
Music Director	HOLLINGSWORTH, John
Music extract	PETRIDES, Petro
Editor	GRAHAM SCOTT, Peter
Sponsor (for Colonial Office)	Ministry of Information

**Synopsis**

Story and commentary: Laurie Lee. A short history of the island is followed by views of the countryside and people in town and village.

**Colonial Film Synopsis**

Credits. Map of Cyprus with major towns and cities highlighted. Panned shot from waves lapping on a beach to the temple of Aphrodite. Stavrovouni Monastery. The ruins of Amathus. Panned shot of empty landscapes. 'Cyprus is like a ring which has passed hand to hand of changing Empires: Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Venetian, Ottoman – she's been worn by them all'. Commentary outlines the arrival of the British in 1878 and that Cyprus is now an island of the British Commonwealth. A boy leading a donkey towards Nikosia. Cypriots: 'for the most part they are a Greek-speaking people, but there are many Turks also'. Shots showing the ethnic and religious

diversity of Nikosia. An anonymous Cypriot village: 'this is a village much like any other in the world, but you will find Cyprus here'. A family cultivating the fields: the 'unchanging tradition of husbandry'. The soil of Cyprus, on which 'the furrows of exhaustion have begun to appear'. Goats eating everything in their path. A goatherd, Vassos, shown sleeping under a tree while his plague-carrying goats destroy the village harvest. A village farmer, Nikos, trying to disperse the goats. A village court, settling the ensuing dispute between Vassos and Nikos: goats are outlawed from the village area; an angry Vassos takes his herd to the forest. The forests of Cyprus, 'less mighty than they had been'. Vassos arrives at a 'rough, wild' village in the forest. A knife-dance in the village. Goats cleared from the forest in order to protect the trees. Alternative work provided for the goatherds, but some 'disgruntled' men commit arson. Vassos shown lighting a fire in the forest; he is caught by wardens and sent to gaol. Dry land in a lowland village suffering from 'an agony of thirst'. A man from the 'Water Supply and Irrigation Department' shows plans for an irrigation project to some villagers. The villagers and the government co-finance the scheme. Locals, overseen by authority figures, build the irrigation system. Vassos is set free and is allowed to farm in the village. The produce of Cyprus: wheat, barley, lemons, oranges, almonds, olive oil, timber and fuel, wine and spirits, tobacco and cigarettes, silk cocoons. Easter celebrations; Vassos dances while Nikos and his family laugh and applaud. Waves lapping on a beach. Ends.

### Context

*Cyprus is an Island* is a black and white documentary shot on location in 1946. Greenpark Productions, the company behind the film, was founded in 1938 by Walter Greenwood, author of *Love on the Dole*, along with his accountant Mr Park. The company specialised in corporate and government films, work that it continued for nearly 50 years. The film was directed by Ralph Keene and scripted by the author and poet Laurie Lee. The latter's involvement came about for several reasons. One was the literary bias of Greenpark Productions (Dylan Thomas and H E Bates had also worked for the company), another was that Lee had previous knowledge of the island, and finally there was a chance encounter with Keene in a British pub (Lee, 1947, 1).

*Cyprus is an Island* was originally intended for a British audience and was premiered in 1946 at the Curzon Cinema in London. The film was subsequently exhibited at international film festivals in France and Czechoslovakia. Writing for the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, the Education Panel Viewing Committee stated that 'It was felt that it could, with advantage, be cut so that one or two of the topics presented in the film would be more fully emphasised' (MFB, November 1947, 167). This was subsequently achieved: a silent film *Farmer and Goatherd* (1950) was edited from the footage and

recommended as a suitable film for geography students aged nine to eleven (*GJ*, January-March 1950, 124).

Lee and Keene detailed their experiences of making the documentary in their book, *We Made a Film in Cyprus*. The film was originally proposed by the Governor of Cyprus and later received the backing of the Colonial Office and the Ministry of Information. The brief for Keene and Lee was to 'find a film about a people as yet unfilmed. A people of whom there was a great deal to say, but of whom a great deal must be left unsaid. [...] We had to make a film about an island which was a crown colony, and we had to show some of the benefits which Colonial Government bestows' (Lee, 1947, 1-2).

On arriving in Cyprus Lee found himself instructed in 'Trade, the agrarian policy, reafforestation, industries, village crafts, the local problems of this and that, lists of localities, sheafs of statistics, Blue Books and reports by the dozen' (Lee, 1947, 1-2). His script was further influenced by situations he encountered on a tour of the island: the campaigning work of village councils, free-ranging goats which were destroying the trees in the forest, the policies of the forestry department. In their maintenance of the forest this department had deprived goatherds of grazing land. This had led to vengeful arson attacks and also to the depopulation of forest villages. Lee notes that 'The Government was planning to move all the families to a lowland site on the western coast, where they would be given fields and taught to farm. Such a thing had not happened in Cyprus before, and it would be a tricky venture' (Lee, 1947, 37).

Administered by the British since 1878 and held as a colony since 1925, Cyprus was subject to separate calls for union with the homelands of both its Greek majority and its Turkish minority. The island suffered from a vacillating British policy during World War II. By late 1940 Greece and Britain were the only countries in Europe resisting fascism and suggestions were made by several officials, including Sir Michael Palaret, the British Minister in Athens, that Cyprus be ceded to Greece to help cement Anglo-Greek solidarity. Members of the Foreign Office overruled the idea in the hope that evidence of their resistance would encourage a pro-British policy in Turkey, a country which nevertheless remained neutral throughout the war. Following the German capture of Athens the exiled Greek government requested that they be stationed in Cyprus. The British government declined, allocating the Greek government to Cairo instead. They did, however, permit the raising of the Greek flag in Cyprus and encouraged Cypriots to 'Fight for Greece and freedom' having earlier discouraged their enlistment in the Greek army. A final request for *enosis* ('union') with Cyprus, made



by the Greek Regent Archbishop Damaskinos in August 1945, was also rejected. Christopher Hitchens has argued that the new Labour Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin 'did not feel confident enough to force it through the cabinet' (Hitchens, 1984, 37).

### Analysis

*Cyprus is an Island* falls into three distinct parts. The opening section of the film has the dual function of outlining the island's history while also highlighting the difference between the British Empire and those who have ruled Cyprus before. As the camera pans slowly over predominantly desolate scenes, the commentator states, 'Cyprus is like a ring which has passed hand to hand of changing Empires: Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Venetian, Ottoman – she's been worn by them all'. As each major epoch is recalled we hear variations on the refrain 'But of the people, at that time, we know nothing'. This absence is symbolised by the recurring motif of an empty pair of peasant's shoes.

British rule is different. The chronological narrative reaches the point where 'Cyprus, now, is an island of the British Commonwealth and these are her people'. At the word 'Commonwealth' the camera films more verdant plains, at the word 'people' the empty shoes are filled. They are worn by a young boy, who is leading a donkey towards Nicosia. Over scenes of the capital the narrative now informs us of the rich cultural mix of the island. Keene writes that here the local authorities requested 'Crowded streets . . . teeming markets . . . busy thoroughfares'. However, it was June and the city was deserted. The team compensated with 'a liberal use of "insert" shots of posters, street signs and placards' (Keene, 1947, 75).

The second and major section of the film fictionalises scenes that Lee encountered during his tour of the island. In this semi-comic parable Vassos, an anarchist goatherd, comes up short against Nikos, an organized local farmer who draws upon village rule to ban free-ranging goats from the locality. Vassos goes on to a wild career of arson in the forest and eventual imprisonment. During these forest scenes the policy of removing goats to protect saplings and of relocating village communities is described in a positive manner. The narrative states that these changes are necessary because 'the forest was the wealth of the whole community and the trees must be protected'. The government is carrying out this measure by 'patient persuasion'.

The scenes of village farming illustrate the 'old, unchanging tradition of husbandry'. Although depicted in an Arcadian manner the narrative talks about the problems of farming the land. It is

described as being ‘weary’, ‘difficult’ and in an ‘agony of thirst’. That is, ‘until there came an answer’. It is at this point that we first witness the British presence on the island. A ‘Water and Irrigation Dept.’ van is shown and we see an official proposing a scheme to the locals. Co-operation in the construction of the dam is stressed. The locals agree to raise some of the money and to provide labour; the government will finance the remainder and monitor the scheme.

The results lead us towards the final and most overtly propagandistic section of the film. The commentary declares that ‘after centuries of poverty and decay a new plan is at work to build up the fertility of the island’. In contrast with the slowly panned sequences of the opening section here we have a brisk montage featuring images of new industry and its resultant abundance. The filmmakers found this section unsatisfactory, but it was imposed upon them by their government backers. Keene notes that ‘we felt it had no place in an otherwise simply agricultural story. But the colonial authorities insisted. It is a pity these people can never realize that the injection of a few shots of garden suburbs, ferro-concrete building and isolated factories, add nothing to the interest or effectiveness of a film of this sort’ (Keene, 1947, 72).

Although generally warmly received, the compromised nature of the film drew some criticism in reviews. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* wrote that ‘The latter part is quite out of place’ (MFB, March 1946, 47). The film was also criticised for ‘evading some of the important political issues which have concerned the Cypriots in recent years’ (DNL, 1946/47, 30). While on his tour of the island Lee had been told about the rape of a village girl by soldiers, and another local had informed him that ‘Cyprus did not belong to Britain, no; it was an old ship boarded by pirates, plundered, and anchored into poverty’ (Lee, 1947, 38, 55). Lee was aware, however, that in a film of this nature ‘a great deal must be left unsaid’ (Lee, 1947, 1).

**Richard Osborne (March 2009)**

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**DARJEELING A FOOT-HILL TOWN**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1645>

Title Ref:

Series Title: INDIAN TOWN STUDIES

Part No: 0

Director:

Prod. Country : GB

Year: 1937

1st Release: 1937

Prodn. Company: Gaumont-British Instructional

Release Country: GB

Release date: 1937

Format:

Run Time (Mins): 10

Length: 866 Feet 264 Metres

Colour Code: B

Colour System:

Sound System: SOUN

Language: ENG

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

Credits

Production Company Gaumont-British Instructional

Producer FIELD, Mary

Supervisor CONS, G.J.

Diagrams JEFFRYES, Reginald

*Synopsis*

INTEREST. The town of Darjeeling. Re-edited material from DARJEELING (Secrets of India series).

Censor certificate (18). Main and series title and credit (50). A map of India, Darjeeling is shown (91). Map of the train route from Calcutta to Darjeeling via Siliguri (117). The 2 foot gauge Darjeeling train: travelling shots of the train and views from the train (160). Tea plantations; tea pickers at work (203). The train – views of the train and views from the train as it passes the 8,000

feet mark and travels down to Darjeeling (250). Ox carts on the road by the train (263). Arrival at Darjeeling station (282). Map of Darjeeling town (301). View of the town (312). Map of town showing the bazaar (357). The bazaar the market place; scenes at the market: HS of pot sellers and vegetable stalls (406). Closer view of vegetable sellers (429). A maker and seller of betel-nuts - a confection of betel leaves and sweet paste (452). A man buys earrings for his wife (495). Two Nepalese girls (500). Two Tibetan beggar women, the first with a prayer wheel (509). The two Nepalese girls as before (512). HS of a European couple who have adopted Indian habits and clothing (531). People walking in a street (546). A Tibetan music group (music not heard) (607). Market scenes (618). Map showing Government House (635). A rickshaw draws up at Government House gates (650). LS of Government House (664). Map showing Observatory Hill (678). Rickshaw pulled and pushed up the hill (743). A Buddhist shrine on the hill with prayer flags (754). A priest prays at the shrine (769). View of Himalayan mountains (791). Map of Northern India showing Darjeeling (798). The Himalayas (812). Map of India (830). Distribution credit (845ft).

Note: The censor certificate refers to the title as A FOOT HILL TOWN - DARJEELING. The actual title reads A FOOT-HILL TOWN.

### *Context*

*A Foot-hill Town* formed part of the Indian Town Studies series produced by Gaumont-British in 1937. This series of films was re-edited from documentaries that the company had produced in 1934 under the 'Secrets of India' banner. These original films were the side-project of a team who had filmed a flight over the Himalayas, which appeared as *Wings Over Everest* in 1934 (Low, 2005, 61). The director of the Everest project, Geoffrey Barkas, and one of the cameramen, S. R. Bonnett, also helmed the original version of this film, *Secrets of India: Darjeeling A Foothill Town* (1934). The 1937 re-edit contains the same material as the original but it is sequenced differently. It also received a more educational slant. Gaumont's educational unit, Gaumont-British Instructional, was responsible for the distribution of this new version. The film was produced by Mary Field, the teacher and historian who had worked on the pioneering natural history series *Secrets of Nature* (1922-33), a series that also employed the talents of Geoffrey Barkas (Easen). The 'supervisor' for the re-edited film was G. J. Cons, head of the Geography department at Goldsmiths College, and a pioneer in the field of geography films for schools (Briault, 1960, 123).

The British developed Darjeeling as one of their 'hill stations'. These towns, located in the cool atmosphere of Indian hills and mountains, served as retreats for the British during the hot Indian

summers. In Dave Kennedy's words: 'To these cloud-enshrouded sanctuaries the British expatriate elite came for seasonal relief not merely from the physical toll of an alien culture. Here they established closed communities of their own kind in a setting of their own design' (Kennedy, 1996, 1). The architecture of the hill stations commonly had affinities with the 'quaint villages of a romanticized England' (Kennedy, 1996, 3). Many of the towns were originally built up around sanatoria, but they increasingly served as places from which British officialdom conducted its rule (Kennedy, 1996, 4). Darjeeling was home to the summer seat of the Governor of Bengal.

The governmental retreat to the hill stations attracted criticism. Kennedy claims that 'Indian nationalists pointed to the practice as evidence of the aloofness and arrogance of British rule' (Kennedy, 1996, 5). This compounded criticisms faced by the Bengal government. During the 1930s the district was subject to nationalist uprisings. These uprisings were also fanned by the draconian ordinances that had been put in place by the Governor, Sir Stanley Jackson, in 1931 in an attempt to curb acts of terrorism. Jackson's successor, Sir John Anderson, ratified the anti-terrorist legislation; the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1932 gave a permanent basis to many of Jackson's temporary ordinance measures (Wheeler-Bennett, 1962, 135). Anderson extended the system of 'collective fines', which were imposed on areas where terrorist members had been sheltered, and he considerably increased the number of troops in Bengal (Wheeler-Bennett, 1962, 135, 138). Both governors survived assassination attempts. The attack on Anderson occurred in 1934, the year of the original version of this documentary. He was shot at by members of the Dacca Anusitan Samiti at the Leborg race course, which is located near to Darjeeling (Dasgupta, 1999, 58-59). In various ways Anderson could be considered to be the more effective of the two governors. As well as organising the response to the nationalist agitation more thoroughly, he also attempted to rehabilitate some of the protesters, including one of his would-be assassins (Wheeler-Bennett, 1962, 143-44).

As the hill stations developed their demographic mix changed. They attracted wealthy Indians, who wished to partake in the lifestyle of the British Raj, as well as a wide variety of labourers who came in search of serving work. Darjeeling became home to Nepalese, Bhutias and Tibetans, as well as the 'aboriginal tribes' the Lepcha, Aka, Dhimal, Mechi, Murmi and Urava (*Newman's Guide to Darjeeling and Neighbourhood*, 193-, 44). Inhabitants were also drawn to the area because of the work on the tea plantations.

### *Analysis*

G. J. Cons believed that 'any director of geographical films [...] needs to have an appreciation of the content and scope of human geography'. However, in *A Foot-Hill Town*, his account of the human

geography of Darjeeling is circumscribed. While the film outlines something of the ethnic mix of Darjeeling and of the trades that are carried out in the area, there is very little contextualisation of the distinct political and cultural factors that drew people to this hill station.

These omissions can be attributed to Cons' own biases. He believed that 'it is the adjustment of human groups to their environment that needs portraying' and that 'it is man in action in the region that defines the angle of vision for the selection of the sequences' (Cons, 1935, 78). *A Foot-hill Town* attempts to bear out these beliefs. The film begins with the use of maps, which illustrate Darjeeling's location in the sub-continent. The viewer is then brought towards the town in sequences that illustrate the journey along the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. Tea clippers are shown at work and the commentary states that the 'moist warm air is suited for growing tea bushes'. There is also a useful panning movement that illustrates first the workers and then their geographical location among the clouds that gather in the mountains. The maps are regularly returned to; they effectively illustrate the fact that Darjeeling is a narrowly shaped town, built along a ridge in the Himalayas. 'Man in action' provides the main subject of the film. Here it is notable that *A Foot-hill Town* concentrates most fully on Darjeeling's Asian population. The most extensive sequence is filmed in the town's bazaar and features a variety of people buying and selling wares. The viewer is informed that 'you can buy everything the Indian housewife wants', and is duly shown the sale of earthenware, jewellery and the making of betel nuts, which 'all Indians love to chew'. The film offers a deliberate ethnographical study of the various groups using the market, and the viewer is instructed to 'notice the different kinds of clothes you can see among the people in the street and the different kinds of faces'. Singled out are 'beggar women from Tibet', 'girls from Nepal' and 'Europeans who have taken to Indian life and clothes' (here there is footage of a white couple who are dressed in robes). Elsewhere there is less commonality between the Europeans and the Asians. In a contemporary Darjeeling guidebook travellers were informed that 'The dandy-bearers and rickshawmen are either Bhutias or Lepchas', and warned that 'They are a dirty, impudent, extortionate set as a rule, but even so, like most hill-men, are "always merry and bright"' (*Newman's Guide to Darjeeling and Neighbourhood*, 193-, 48-49). In this film there is footage of these rickshaw-bearers at work, hauling two English visitors up the steep slopes towards Observatory Hill. To the accompaniment of overdubbed sounds the commentator states that the coolies 'grunt and groan', largely in the hope that they will get 'a good tip'.

It is perhaps this focus on 'man in action' that encourages the film to downplay Darjeeling's political role. There is footage of Government House (in which rickshaw bearers are also in evidence), but it takes up a brief amount of screen time. While it was being filmed it appears to have been

unoccupied: the commentator states that this British-styled residence is the place ‘to which the Governor of Bengal comes in summer, when it is very hot in the plains around Calcutta’. There is no footage of the Governor himself, and in contrast to the footage of the bazaar these scenes are largely depopulated.

Some of the omissions in *A Foot-Hill Town* can be attributed to the material that was to hand. G. J. Cons believed that in the filming of a region ‘its most significant rhythms, daily and seasonal, must be carefully selected and then arranged in an appropriate time sequence to give unity’ (1935, 79). In this documentary, however, he was let down by the footage that was available. Although the film was re-edited to give a sense of journeying from the base of the foot-hill towards its peak, it has no temporal rhythm and there is little balance between its scenes. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* criticised the film on the grounds that the scenes of tea clipping ‘did not remain on the screen long enough’ and that ‘more of the geography of the surrounding country could have been shown’ (*MFB*, 1 December 1937, 262).

The journal is not critical of one of the film’s other omissions: using Cons’ own words, there is ‘no attempt to explain the causes of the phenomena depicted’ (1935, 79). Here, however, it should be borne in mind that the film was designed for viewing in the classroom, and that the same critique could equally be applied to films in the same genres with non-colonial subjects. Cons believed that if contextualisation were needed, ‘it can be left to the teacher and the text-book’ (1935, 79).

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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**DARJEELING - SIR STANLEY JACKSON**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1291>  
 Title Ref: Sift 14431  
 Director:  
 Prod. Country: GB  
 Year: 1937  
 1st Release: 1937  
 Prodn. Company:  
 Release Country: GB  
 Format: 16  
 Run Time (Mins): 8  
 Length: 280 Feet 85 Metres  
 Colour Code: B  
 Colour System:  
 Sound System: SLNT  
 Language:  
 Dubbed: N  
 Subtitled: N  
 Credits  
 Photography MEIKLEJOHN, W.

*Synopsis*

INTEREST. "Darjeeling - summer seat of the Bengal government". A shot of the hill road to Darjeeling. Natives herd sheep. Other natives are dragging a roller along (14). More sheep by the side of the railway track (21). A car, with a woman and a dog next to it, is stopped by the side of the track. A train approaches (26). The car and the train again moving along together (31). A shot of waterfall with 3 people walking nearby (36). "Darjeeling - Himalayan Railway 2'6" gauge with a rise approximately 6,500 feet in 30 miles". A train is steaming up the hill round a bend. It is then seen on the horizon. A final shot of the train on its journey (58). "General view with Kenchanjunga in the background" (74). "Government House and arrival of Sir Stanley Jackson and Lady Jackson from England 1930". Government House. Guard of honour waits as cars arrive and go up the driveway. Guard of honour is then dismissed (87). "Public Park and Band Stand" (102). "Church and Town Hall". Some busy street scenes (111). "Distant view of Lebong where the British Regiments are stationed and the races are held every summer" (121). "Governor's Cup Race Day".

"Prize-giving by Sir Stanley and Lady Jackson". Horses racing around a track. Crowds milling about. Lady Jackson hands out cups to various people. Then Sir Stanley does the same (148). "Kenchanjunga taken from the house of the Divisional Forest Officer" (169). "View over the Sanatorium and Town showing the Moonsoon [monsoon] clouds" (191). "Looking down on the weekly market". Shots of the open air market; wares displayed on the ground (206). "Views and types to be seen daily in the market and town". Close-ups of various natives (232). "Coronation Parade - Darjeeling 1937". People in uniform are ranged outside a building which has a poster with "God Save the King" on it. The streets are decorated with pennants and banners. The car goes along the street. A close-up of 3 soldiers in dress uniform. One high official gets out of the car and inspects the parade. The band plays while they march past (280 ft).

### *Context*

Darjeeling is situated in the Indian state of West Bengal. The town lies close to the Himalayas, an area opened up to the British following their defeat of the kingdom of Nepal in 1815 (Kennedy, 1996, 12). Located in the cool air of the hillside, Darjeeling's climate was suited to the British. The town was built up around a sanatorium, constructed originally for British soldiers in 1839. It was one of the 'hill stations', towns to which British officials retreated during the hot Indian summers. Dave Kennedy has described the European-based design of hill towns, with their meandering roads, parks with English trees and flowers, cottages, Tudor mansions and Anglican churches (Kennedy, 1996, 3-4). He summarises their appeal for expatriates as that they 'seemed a part of England and apart from India' (Kennedy, 1996, 8).

Darjeeling expanded in size throughout nineteenth century. It was made more accessible due to the opening of a narrow gauge railway in 1879, and the introduction of the tea plantations in the mid-nineteenth century brought new workers to the area. Like other hill stations, the population of Darjeeling became more mixed. Aboriginal tribesmen, such as the Bhutias and the Lepcha, were attracted to the city for work, as were Nepalese, Bhutias and Tibetans. In addition, wealthy Indians were drawn to hill stations, seeking to replicate the lifestyles of the British Raj (Kennedy, 1996, 8-9).

As well as serving as retreats, the hill stations were also places from which British officials undertook government business. Kennedy has stated that 'nearly every branch of officialdom that had access to a hill station endeavored to spend more of its time and transfer more of its operations there' (Kennedy, 1996, 4). He claims that conducting operations from such remote seats was widely

criticised, and that 'Indian nationalists pointed to the practice as evidence of the aloofness and arrogance of British rule' (Kennedy, 1996, 5).

In this film Sir Stanley Jackson, Governor of Bengal from 1927-1932, can be seen arriving at Darjeeling's Government House. Jackson was governor during a period of nationalist uprising in the area, and had responded to terrorist threats by putting in place a number of severe ordinances (*Time*, 14 December 1931). It was over these measures that Gandhi clashed with the Viceroy Lord Willingdon, leading to Gandhi's endorsement of a further period of civil disobedience and to his own subsequent incarceration (*Time*, 11 January 1932). On 6 February 1932, Jackson survived an assassination attempt from the nationalist revolutionary Bina Das. She justified her actions on the grounds that 'the Governor of Bengal represents a system of repression which has kept enslaved three hundred millions of my countrymen and countrywomen' (Kumar, 1993, 91). Jackson's measures were enforced and ratified by his successor, Sir John Anderson. This film features scenes shot at Lebong racecourse, later to be the location of an assassination attempt on Anderson's life.

William Meiklejohn shot this amateur footage of Darjeeling and the surrounding area during the early 1930s. Meiklejohn worked with the Imperial Forestry Service in various parts of the sub-continent (Baker). Darjeeling had been a large forest area, but much of the land had been stripped for tea plantations. A contemporary travel guide described the work of the forestry service as 'preservation of the existing forest and the supply of fuel and timber' (*Newman's Guide to Darjeeling and Neighbourhood*, 193-, 78).

### *Analysis*

William Meiklejohn's studies put on show various aspects of life in and around Darjeeling: he captures the atmosphere of British life at a hill station; he records some of the wealthy Indians who were drawn to this world; and he also shows us the native workers who arrived there to conduct their trades.

The opening title card introduces the town as being the 'summer seat of the Bengal Government'. Despite the nationalist agitation and advancement that took place during this period, the film presents British rule as being firmly entrenched. Near the beginning of the film Sir Stanley Jackson and his wife can be seen arriving from England. This footage was filmed in 1930 and it shows them being greeted at the gates of Government House with a parade and a presentation of arms by Indian soldiers. The film concludes with scenes taken some seven years later. Here another parade can be

seen, a more elaborate affair celebrating the coronation of King George VI. On show there is a large banner proclaiming 'God Save the King'. A motorcade can be seen driving through streets decorated with pennants and bunting.

Elsewhere Meiklejohn captures the architectural surroundings that helped to reinforce the British sense of security. Various European-styled homes are on display, and he depicts smart European promenaders at leisure in the public park. This landscape is complete with flowerbeds and bandstand. There are also shots of the Anglican Church and its largely British congregation.

In contrast Meiklejohn presents his 'views and types to be seen daily in the market and town'. This footage features ethnographical snapshots of the various races that had been drawn to Darjeeling. He pictures street musicians, traders and Asian women. What is notable about the scenes of the market is the absence of British people. Meiklejohn presents these scenes as being a world apart.

Providing another contrast are the scenes filmed at the Lebong racecourse. These take place on Governor's Cup Race Day, where cups are awarded to the winners by Sir Stanley Jackson and his wife, both of whom are sharply dressed. What is also captured is the mixture of racegoers: the crowd consists of both British and aspirant Indian spectators. Many of the Indian men are dressed in formal European clothing.

Meiklejohn also has an eye for Darjeeling's tourist attractions. There is footage of the narrow-gauge railway; several views of the Himalayas; and atmospheric footage of monsoon clouds gathering, shot over the roofs of the sanatorium and the town. Robin Baker has argued that, as an amateur filmmaker, Meiklejohn had 'a better eye for composition than most' (Baker). This film is testament to his abilities to select, frame, shoot and edit those compositions. His camera is generally on the move, but he has a steady hand and effectively brings into play the elements of each scene.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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FILM TITLE:

**DEFENDERS OF INDIA**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5750>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1941

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

India

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Film Advisory Board of India

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Indian Film Unit

SHORT SUMMARY:

A tribute to the Indian troops who had fought in the Libyan campaign.

FULL SUMMARY:

Over film of Indian troops marching near Pyramids, commentator speaks of Indians serving in many areas overseas but especially in Libya: this leads into General Auchinleck who (speaking to the camera) talks of the quality of the soldiers under him. A brief sequence on training (Carriers and Bren guns) with praise of Indians for quick learning followed by shots of despatch riders, convoy moving to new positions, pitching camp, digging trenches, digging out lorry stuck in sand, air raid alert. Some (newsreel, not very well reprinted) action and advance material followed by more shots of marching soldiers (with occasional close ups) and film of Italian prisoners. "Fighting for the Empire, and reasonableness, and decency... They may have setbacks, but they will triumph".

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Parmar, Pratap: film editor

Shaw, Alexander: producer

PRODUCTION CAST:

Stimson, Robert: commentator

Auchinleck, Claude (General): introduction ("with foreword by")

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

LPU

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/N

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

757 ft

RUNNING TIME:

8 mins

BLACK &amp; WHITE / COLOUR:

B&amp;W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTTILES:

None

**Context**

In July 1940, the Film Advisory Board (FAB) was constituted to oversee the production of propaganda films in India. Organised by the Government of India, the FAB was comprised primarily of leading figures of the Indian film industry. The production of films was partly funded by the British government's Ministry of Information (MoI), who therefore had a say in the appointment of staff (Woods, 2001, 297). Disappointed with the quality of early FAB films, the MoI suggested that a British documentary expert should supervise production (Garga, 2007, 66-67). Alex Shaw, a filmmaker of some standing, was duly selected and arrived in India in late 1940.

Although Shaw succeeded in improving the quality of the FAB's films, he resigned after only 10 months in the post, claiming that this was 'partly on personal grounds, partly because he was not accepted by the Indian industry' (Garga, 2007, 80). His appointment had been widely criticised in the Indian movie press, and Shaw further believed that the Indian members of the FAB had wanted his efforts to fail (Garga, 2007, 69-70; Woods, 2001, 301). B.D. Garga argues that 'Shaw was the right man for the job but had arrived at the wrong time' (Garga, 2007, 70-71). His term in India coincided with a period of nationalist civil disobedience. Shaw had wanted to make films that addressed the political situation, but found little desire on anybody's part for films about the situation and certainly not for those made by a British filmmaker.



Shaw produced 13 original documentary films while in India, a high proportion of which report on military matters. *Defenders of India* was edited by Pratap Parmar, who Shaw described as the 'mainstay of the Unit' (Garga, 2007, 73); it was 'recorded' at the film studios of Bombay Talkies, whose Rai Bahadur Chunilal was a member of the FAB. The film covers the Indian troops who fought in the Libyan campaign, the first campaign in World War II in which Indian troops had a fighting role. Ashley Jackson has stated that at the outbreak of the War the Indian Army was a 'dated force' (Jackson, 2006, 364). In his terms, modernisation started 'perilously late' (Jackson, 2006, 364). The number of Indian soldiers expanded rapidly, however, from around 200,000 men in 1939 to around 900,000 by the end of 1941 (Jackson, 2006, 363). It was in January 1941 that Sir Claude Auchinleck, who provides the foreword to this film, was created Commander-in-Chief of India.

Shaw wished to introduce a more subtle and less authoritarian form of war propaganda to the FAB, but could not go as far as he desired. While he believed that propaganda should be 'concealed as far as possible' (Garga, 2007, 71), J.B.H. Wadia, chairman of the FAB, called for 'direct war propaganda in our films' (Garga, 2007, 72). Wadia argued that, as the films were aimed at a predominantly illiterate Indian audience, they needed to be told in a 'straight-from-the-shoulder manner' (Garga, 2007, 72). In India the FAB films were dubbed into several languages, and were circulated to the country's 200 English-language cinemas and 1,000 Indian-language cinemas. They were also distributed, via mobile cinema vans, to the vast rural population who provided the main source of military recruits (Woods, 2001, 299).

Shaw's remit was further complicated by the differing aims of the Government of India and the MoI. The former body was chiefly concerned with the reception of the FAB's films in India, whereas the MoI was interested in their reception beyond the sub-continent (Woods, 2001, 298-99). The MoI wanted the films be shown in Britain, in other Empire countries, and also in the USA. These separate markets brought further confusion about how the War cause should be portrayed.

In the USA and Britain the Shaw-era FAB films were usually only accorded a non-theatrical release. Nevertheless, according to MoI figures, *Defenders of India* had been shown to 180,000 people by March 1943 (Leach, 22 March 1943). The MoI also remarked upon the improved standard of FAB's films, although noting that their 'weak point' remained their commentaries (Leach, 22 March 1943). Meanwhile, R.R. Ford, film officer for the British Library of Information of New York, regarded *Defenders of India* and an accompanying film *The Handymen* as representing a 'great advance' on earlier

films. However, in accordance with his desire that British officers be ‘kept out of the picture’, the footage of Auchinleck was excised from the film for its American release (Ford, 15 October 1941).

### Analysis

Perhaps understandably, given the circumstances surrounding the creation of the film, *Defenders of India* is pulled in a number of directions. The film’s geographical perspective shifts: both in terms of the countries that it focuses on, and in regard to those that it is addresses. The background to the film is the contribution of India’s troops to the Libyan campaign: Auchinleck begins his foreword by recalling ‘the great part played by Indian troops in the defeat of Italy in Africa’, and the film concludes with borrowed footage of this campaign. The bulk of *Defenders of India* is filmed in Egypt – regularly illustrated by using pyramids as a backdrop – and deals with the training of Indian troops. However, a more important geographical location is the one that is mentioned in the film’s title. Although these troops are working abroad, they are ‘defenders of India’. In his address, Auchinleck argues that ‘These Indian troops who are fighting in the Middle East, and those other Indian troops which are standing on guard in the Far East, are protecting India: they are keeping the war at a distance from India’s shores’.

In this respect, the film is addressed to potential Indian recruits. Furthering this drive, the soldiers are portrayed as being noble (the camera often looks upwards, framing individual soldiers against clear Egyptian skies), ordered (the film opens and closes with marching Indian troops) and efficient (there is detailed footage of the soldiers undertaking various parts of their training). The soldiers also receive many words of praise: they are described as being ‘aspiring’ and ‘brave’ and of showing ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘enterprise’. This boosting of the Indian soldier serves other purposes. The film is also addressed to those beyond the sub-continent, as indicated by the regular use of the word ‘they’ to describe the Indians who appear on screen. The film wishes to reassure soldiers in other parts of the Empire of the ability and comradeship of Indian troops. Auchinleck talks of the ‘reputation which they have gained amongst their fellow soldiers from all parts of the commonwealth who are fighting side-by-side with them’. There is a repeated stress that the soldiers’ training and their equipment are now up to speed. The film closes with rapidly cut images of equipped Indians, matched by rapid-fire commentary: ‘these are the men: the men of the tanks, the men of the lorries, the men of the Bren guns, the men of the rifles’. British officers are shown to be in command. As well as the notable intrusion of Auchinleck (who is filmed in his office, sat behind his desk), there

are recurring scenes at the training camp in which the British officers orchestrate activities. In this respect, the American audience does not appear to have been the filmmakers' main concern.

The filmmakers have made fair use of the materials to hand. The borrowed footage of the Libyan campaign does not contain many shots of Indian troops, and so the main activity takes place in the training camp. Although this gives the filmmakers the freedom to frame the soldiers and their training as desired, the film does suffer from a lack of action. Some dynamism is achieved by filming scenes from several perspectives and by constructing a narrative that links the activities together. However, the commentary, which is spoken in an upper-class British accent, is overly dramatic and frequently sounds ridiculous (for example, 'it is no picnic – it is war!', said to the accompaniment of a tent being erected). It falls to the commentary to attempt to reconcile the film's multiple aims: 'These are the men who, fighting for the Empire, and reasonableness and decency, are defending their homeland'. No matter what its perspective, this is a film in which bombastic propaganda wins out over subtlety.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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**DELHI**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1644>

Title Ref: Sift 184786

Director: NIETER, Hans M.

Prod. Country: GB

Year: 1938

1st Release: 1938 1st.TX (C.): 1938

Prodn. Company: World Window

Release Country: GB

Format: 35

Run Time (Mins): 9

Length: 950 Feet 290 Metres

Colour Code: C

Colour System: TECH

Sound System : SOUN

Language: ENG

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

Credits:

Director NIETER, Hans (C)

a World Window production World Window

Distributed by United Artists

Produced by KELLER, E.S.

Produced by KELLER, F.W.

Technicolor Photography CARDIFF, Jack

Editor NIETER, Hans (C)

Music BRAU, Ludwig

Logo [Sound System] Western Electric Mirrophonic

**Synopsis**

Main title and credits. Map of India, which zooms in on Delhi. Fade to view of plains near Delhi. Panning movement towards ruins. Commentary talks of the successive cities of Delhi. Tomb of Nasiruddin Muhammad Hymayun. Victories of Jalaluddin Mohammed Akbar commemorated in domes, arches and an iron column. The Qutb-Minar tower of victory, 238 feet high. The Great

Mosque of the Moghuls, commemorating the Muslim invasion. Muslims wash face and hands in pools at the mosque. The Pearl Mosque, 'pinnacle of Mogul art in Delhi'. Indian women in brightly coloured saris in the palace gardens. Description of saris and of the 'pujah', that Brahmins wear on their brows. Indian men and women relaxing in the palace grounds. British man in army uniform blowing bugle. Cut back to the palace garden. Cut back to bugler. Cut back to palace garden, cross-fade removes people from the scene. Indians marching in khaki uniforms. Indian directing traffic in New Delhi. Description of new city. Woman in sari gets into soft-top VW Beetle. Connaught Place, 'the business centre of the modern Delhi'. Description of architecture as being a British-Indian mix. Views of the House of Assembly and its grounds, and talk of combined British, Muslim and Hindu rule. Tracking shot following woman in sari who walks by a pool in New Delhi's public squares. Steps of new building showing both British and Indian people present. Indian gardener watering bushes. View of governmental buildings and gardens. 180 degree pan showing vast grounds of the 'ninth enduring city'.

### **Context**

*Delhi* is one of a number of travelogue films made by the company World Window in the late 1930s. The company was the brainchild of the wealthy husband and wife team F.W. Keller and E.S. Keller. Inspired by the results of their own amateur travel films, the Kellers sought out a film crew to make professional travelogues, beginning with a series of films shot in Europe and then later filming in Asia (Cardiff, 1996, 50). The team that the Kellers put together included the director and editor Hans Nieter and the renowned cinematographer Jack Cardiff. World Window was formed specifically to produce these ten-minute documentaries, which were distributed in both Britain and America by the American company United Artists.

Delhi has been continuously inhabited since at least the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and it is the location of a series of archaeological sites and remains. The city has frequently served as the capital of India, holding this position for the Mughal Empire from 1649 to 1847, for the British from 1911 to 1947 (Calcutta had earlier been the capital of British India), and for the Republic of India from 1947 up to the present. After the British selected the city as their capital they commenced building the political and administrative district of 'New Delhi', set among the ruins of earlier habitations. The design was primarily the work of the British architect Edwin Lutyens, who built in a style that united European and Asian architecture. Its main basis, however, was in the western classical tradition. For Lutyens, it was this architectural language that best represented 'the ideal of British Empire' (Irving, 1982, 9).

Rather than imitating what he called the 'weird rhythm' of Indian architecture, Oriental aspects were incorporated into his system but were not allowed to determine it (Irving, 1982, 7).

Robert Grant Irving claims that Lutyens' design 'was meant to be a telling affirmation of power and of the passionate British resolve to bring order to India'; he adds that, 'by February 1931, and official completion of the city, many realized New Delhi's inaugural celebrations were but a requiem for that dream of ordered dominion' (Irving, 1982, 23). The inter-war period in India was marked by a series of clashes between the British government and Indian nationalists, which by the early 1930s were taking the form of widespread civil disobedience. The period also witnessed marked gains in Indian political power, culminating with the 1935 Government of India Act, which agreed in principle to a 'Federation of India' and also granted a large degree of autonomy to the provincial governments. This film of Delhi was shot in 1938, a year after the local elections which had seen the Indian National Congress assume majority power in several of the provinces. By 1939, however, Congress had withdrawn its co-operation in government and the plans for a federation had been abandoned. Georges Clemenceau predicted a similar future for Lutyens' New Delhi, which he had witnessed emerging among archaeological remains. He stated that 'This will be the finest ruin of them all' (Irving, 1982, 23)

### **Analysis**

Filmed in 1938, less than a decade before Indian independence, *Delhi* has a curious tale to tell. 'Delhi', the viewer is informed, 'is the cockpit of the Indian Empire', it provides the 'gateway to the riches of the south'. The opening sections of the film focus upon those who have tried and failed to establish a lasting power in the capital. 'At Delhi', the commentator states, 'successive cities have been built by conquering invaders – each has fallen into disuse and decay'. The camerawork focuses on the 'impressive ruins' of these earlier invaders. Although the film also depicts the enduring architecture of Muslim rulers, such as Akbar and Shahjahan, it is stressed that their power has been superseded. Legend has it that it will be the ninth city of Delhi that 'will endure and will rule forever'. Shahjahan had built the eighth.

Two thirds of the way through the film we get a dramatic interjection. Shahjahan's old Delhi has been depicted as a city in which 'the pursuit of happiness is expressed in languor'. The film has shown the doleful courtly rituals of high caste Brahmins, who stroll and relax among the old palace gardens. But then there is a sudden change. A jarring cut provides us with the image and the sound of a British soldier blowing his bugle. There is a then a cut back to the palace gardens, still filled with

perambulating Indians, but then a cross-fade removes these people from the scene. And then there is a cut back to the bugler. Military music commences and there is then footage of marching Indians in khaki uniforms. British power has arrived. It is the *Raj* that will witness the 'ninth enduring Delhi'.

This eternal city is represented with images of Lutyens' architecture. There is extensive footage of Connaught Place and of the new governmental buildings and grounds. What marks this film out, however, is that it envisages the future as being a combined British and Indian endeavour. The film depicts the new House of Assembly where, it states, 'British, Muslims and Hindus combine in governing'. The film then argues that this 'spirit of the new and vital Delhi' has been 'externalised in a new style of architecture, deriving its inspiration not from one tradition but from two, moulding the culture of two continents'. It is notable that the film does not mention the dominant hand that Lutyens played in this architectural design. Also notable are the characteristics that the film attributes to each country. Old Delhi is depicted as a place of 'extreme lassitude', while the New Delhi is 'dynamic'. Indian architecture is 'beautiful' and 'almost effeminate'; the British have introduced the 'austere geometry of modern architecture'. The film talks of a 'neo-Indian' Delhi, which is represented by an image of an Indian woman driving a Volkswagen Beetle.

The film's commentary argues that 'British and Indians are co-operating to carve out a nobler future for this Delhi than was possible under the despotism'. Its images, editing and structure do much to undercut this statement, however. First, there is little evidence of co-operation: instead Indians and British are depicted as being 'others'. They dress differently, act differently, and are not witnessed interacting. Secondly, the film emphasises India's continuing traditions, not its future. The Indians who are on most prominent display are the women who walk among the palace gardens, just as in times past. Thirdly, the British that we see are hardly non-despotic. They are introduced by means of military images, and most British people are seen in army uniform. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the British era is introduced with sudden and jarring images; the editing here argues against compatibility with Indian life. Finally, the film is undercut by its own narrative structure. It covers successive periods of power and successive styles of architecture - is the viewer really to believe that this ninth incarnation of Delhi will be the one that endures forever?

Richard Osborne (October 2009)

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*Titles*

\* CINEMATOGRAPHICAL RECORD OF THE MAGNIFICENT AND HISTORICAL CEREMONIES OF DECEMBER 12TH, 1911 (Alternative)

**DELHI DURBAR**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1455>

## Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

\* Colour:

Black/White

\* Sound:

Silent

\* Footage:

1000

## Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

Great Britain

\* Producer

BROMHEAD, A.C.

\* Photography

GAUMONT, Raymond

\* Photography

GORDON, Kenneth

\* Production Company

Gaumont Company

**Synopsis**

Main title (1). "A cinematographic record of the magnificent & historical ceremonies of December 12th, 1911." (7). In a large arena, kilted British soldiers are marched to their positions in front of the large dais (55). "March of the Indian Mutiny veterans." (61). March past of the veterans (113). "Arrival of the King." (116). XLS of the massed ranks of soldiers as the Royal carriage and cavalry escort pass through them (128). Arrival at the smaller dais of the Royal carriage. King George V and Queen Mary, in their regalia, alight (152). Closer view of the dais and the King and Queen enthroned

(oblique view). The Princes of India pay homage (173). "How the Gaekwar of Baroda paid homage to King George." (178). Four Indian princes, separately pay homage (211). "The Begum of Bhopal the only lady who paid homage to Their Majesties." (218). The Begum approaches the King and Queen and bows (233). Six further Indian princes pay homage (292). A number of judges in regalia pay homage (303). A line of princes pay homage (317). The Royal party and entourage stand and walk to the larger dais (353). The umbrellas held over the King and Queen can be seen as they pass to the larger dais through the massed ranks of soldiers (484). "The Proclamation." (486). LS of the dais; the King and Queen are enthroned (489). Closer view of the same; the King passes a scroll (?) to the Viceroy (?); pan right of the massed ranks who give three cheers (547). The King and Queen return to the smaller dais (634). "King George presenting colours to British Regiments December 11th, 1911." (643). The Queen alights from a carriage and is escorted to her place in the grandstand (660). The King, in uniform, presents the colours which are blessed by a bishop (715). "The King Emperor and Queen Emperess's garden party December 13th, 1911." (722). The King rides on horseback followed by the Queen and Royal party in a carriage. They pass through the crowds at the garden party. An Indian cavalry escort follows them (823). "King George's great Durbar review of 50,000 Indian troops December 14th, 1911 (829). The Royal Standard is raised (846). The Royal carriage bearing the Queen arrives and she is escorted to the Royal box. The King, in uniform and on horseback, takes the salute as the Indian army marches past (932). The camel corps ride past (948ft). Note: Other copies are held of 270ft, 480ft, 573ft and 700ft, containing some variations in contents.

### Context

'Durbar' is a Persian term that was adopted in India to refer to a ruler's court. It could be used to refer to a feudal state council or to a ceremonial gathering. It was this latter sense that was taken up by the British Raj when, during the 'high noon' of Empire, three imperial Durbars were held in Delhi, each marking royal occasions. The first, held in 1877, marked the proclamation of Queen Victoria as Queen Empress of India. The second, held in 1902-03, marked the coronation of King Edward VII. The last, held on 12 December 1911, marked the coronation of King George V, and was the only Durbar that the ruler attended in person. The 1911 Durbar cost over £1 million to mount, and was over a year in preparation. Over 200,000 people were expected for the events taking place in Delhi's Coronation Park (Bottomore, 311).

According to Stephen Bottomore, the ceremony and ritual that accompanied royal visits was an aid 'in maintaining the submission of India' (Bottomore, 311). The Durbar was also used for particular

political purposes. King George announced the reversal of the unpopular 1905 decision that had partitioned Bengal, while also announcing the transfer of the capital of British India from Calcutta (in Bengal) to Delhi. The royal visit did receive criticism in India, some of it centred on the fact while only crowned 'King' in England, George V's title in India was 'King-Emperor' (Trevethick, 1990, 572).

There was also a controversial incident at the Durbar itself. As part of the formalities the Indian Princes were expected to pay obeisance to the King. Here, the modernising Gaekwar of Baroda, who was considered by the British to have seditious tendencies (Bhagavan, 2001, 406), caused offence by performing only a perfunctory bow and then turning his back on the ruler. There is debate over whether this was an intended snub, and whether or not it was the Gaekwar who made this gesture; however the net result was outrage in the British press and a subsequent weakening of the Gaekwar's power (Bhagaavan, 2001, 406-08; Bottomore, 1997, 331-34).

Royal ceremonials were a popular subject for early newsreels. Consequently this event 'was probably the greatest effort in news coverage that the young film industry had yet undertaken' (Bottomore, 1997, 335). Over a dozen cameramen from five different British film companies were despatched to cover the Durbar (Bottomore, 1997, 309, 314). Speed was of the essence, and the companies competed with each other to process their films and rush them back to Britain for viewing (Bottomore, 1997, 325-26). The films were hugely popular in Britain, with interest being fuelled by the 'Gaekwar Incident', which had been covered in the British press (*Bioscope*, 4 January 1912, 11; Bottomore, 1997, 321, 331). The films were also distributed widely abroad; among the countries showing them were India, America, France, Germany, Australia, Fiji, and Singapore (Bottomore, 1997, 328).

Unfortunately, filmmaking wasn't prioritised at the event itself. The organising officials believed that the cameramen should not be visible to the attendant public, and as such most were confined to filming from a distance (Bottomore, 1997, 318-21). This film of the Durbar was made by the Gaumont Company, which was founded in France in 1895. According to Bottomore, Gaumont 'put most effort into it [filming the Durbar], and they were also the first to screen footage back in Britain' (Bottomore, 1997, 316). The production manager for the project was the head of the British branch of the company, Alfred Bromhead. He employed five of the 'best and most travelled' cameramen for the project, including Kenneth Gordon, who would become one of Britain's most highly regarded newsreel cameramen, and Raymond Gaumont, son of the head of the company

(Bottomore, 1997, 316). Gaumont issued the film in three different lengths: 500, 700, and 1000 ft. The longer versions included scenes such as the unveiling of the King Edward Memorial Tablet, the Presentation of Colours, and the Church Parade (Bottomore, 1997, 344).

### Analysis

This cut of the Gaumont footage of the King George V's tour of India is edited so that it foregrounds what the title card proclaims as the 'magnificent & historical ceremonies of December 12<sup>th</sup> 1911'. The Delhi Durbar takes up most of the film, but it is supplemented by footage of the King presenting colours to the British regiments, an event that took place the preceding day, and by a royal garden party and a review of '50,000 Indian troops', which took place on 13 and 14 December respectively.

The Durbar itself is related in chronological order, beginning with a march of veterans from the Indian Mutiny, followed by the arrival of the king, the obeisance of the Princes, and the royal proclamation. As Stephen Bottomore recounts, Gaumont were privileged in being assigned three separate camera positions on the day: shooting from the roof of the spectator's enclosure; from ground level within the enclosure; and from a platform within the arena itself (Bottomore, 1997, 320-21). Their filmed sequences cut between footage shot from all three of these positions, with a bias towards the cameraman occupying the arena platform. Nevertheless, even from this position much of the action takes place in the distance. In addition, people often stand in front of this camera, obscuring its intended view. It is notable that each of the cameras remains trained on events taking place within the arena area: the vast watching crowds are throughout only visible in the far distance.

What the camera captures instead is the vast scale of the military display (both on the day of the Durbar and in the presenting of colours and the review of troops), and the splendour of the regal formalities. The King and Queen are both in full regalia, wearing crowns and ermine-lined robes. They are being fanned and shaded by a large retinue of Indian serving people, and as they manoeuvre young Indian pageboys carry their trains. As Bottomore notes, the cinema viewer is as divorced from proceedings as a spectator in the stands would be. He states that 'Perhaps distant camera positions were designed to mirror the respectful *human* distance with a respectful *photographic* distance between commoner and royalty' (Bottomore, 1997, 336, emphasis in original).

The 1911 Durbar nevertheless provided a major cinematic event: the Gaekwar incident. Unlike other media, it was argued that the film footage could provide precise documentation of what had taken place. The *Bioscope* stated that in doing so the cinema proved its 'immense superiority over the illustrated newspaper' (*Bioscope*, 4 Jan 1912, 11). Gaumont were aware that the public would have come to see this action, and consequently they signal its approach with a intertitle that proclaims, 'HOW THE GAEKWAR OF BARODA PAID HOMAGE TO KING GEORGE'. However, rather than providing conclusive evidence, the Durbar films caused confusion. In the Gaumont film the sequence begins abruptly and ends inconclusively; it is hard to tell whether the Gaekwar's actions are intentional or not. In addition, there is footage of the Begum of Bhopal, who also turns her back on the King and Queen. Moreover, there was at least one other Prince who during the ceremonies turned his back on the royal party: different film companies identified different individuals as the Gaekwar. Bottomore believes that the Gaumont film has it wrong, and instead shows the actions of the Maharaja of Mysore (Bottomore, 1997, 334). On seeing the film evidence, some sections of the British press argued that they now believed that the Gaekwar had not made an intended snub (Nuckolls, 1990, 529-59). Nevertheless, regardless of this confusion the images still retained some power: when the Barker Company's film of the Durbar was shown in Calcutta their footage of the 'incident' was edited out (Bottomore, 1997, 331-33).

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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## EINE PARTIE FISCHFANG BEI DEM MAHARADSCHA VON KAPURTHALA

Web Address <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/997>

### Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

\* Colour:

Black/White

\* Sound:

Silent

\* Footage:

110

### Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

France

\* Production Company

Raleigh et Robert

### Synopsis

INTEREST. The Maharajah of Kapurthala and his guests on their journey towards the fishing grounds: men riding on elephants (29). A rest period: Indians and Europeans sitting in circles talking and smoking (65). Indian dignitaries bowing at the Maharajah's feet as a token of their respect: the Maharajah is seated with European men and women either side of him. Indians approach singly and bow low at his feet (96). The company standing on the banks of the River Bias, while men manoeuvre long canoes in the river and arrange their nets by means of poles (151). Men hauling on the nets from the banks (176). Men spearing fish from their boats (223). Fish jumping in the water as the nets are drawn closer together between the boats (293). The nets, full of fish, lying on the river bank. The men begin to sort them (317ft).

### Context

The company Robert et Robert was founded by Charles Raleigh and Isidor Robert Schwobthaler in France in 1903, as a distributor of British, Danish and Italian films. In 1909 the company briefly branched into film production, before folding in 1913 (Abel, 1994, 38).

*Eine Partie Fischfang Bei Dem Maharadscha von Kapurthala* (1911) is a travelogue, one of the most popular genres of film in the early years of cinema. Travelogues developed from preceding media representations of travel, such as magic lantern shows, illustrated lectures, postcards and pictorial magazines, which had catered for what Jennifer Lynn Peterson terms a '19<sup>th</sup>-century taste for the exotic' (Peterson). The cinematic conventions of travelogues evolved in the first decade of the twentieth century, and it was also in this period that French companies became the most renowned makers of these films (Peterson). The films were usually comprised of a series of discrete sequences; they featured a large number of long shots; and there would be movement in almost every scene (either created by camera movement or by the action on screen). Many films fixated on the native body moving through 'cultural activities' (Rony, 1996, 83). They also regularly featured ethnographic portraits of people. Fatimah Rony points out that 'there is rarely an attempt to construct the camera as a hidden voyeur: in early travelogues, people [...] stare at the camera' (Rony, 1996, 83). Although shown in a variety of contexts, including lectures, fairground shows and movie theatres, travelogues were aimed primarily at an educated audience, and erred towards the point of view of a 'bourgeois tourist' (Rony, 1996, 83).

This film depicts Tikka Jagajit Singh, the Maharaja of Kapurthala, accompanied by European and Indian guests, on an outing to witness fishing on the River Bias. Located in the Punjab region, Kapurthala was one of India's Princely states. These states were nominally autonomous and were outside the government of India's tax base. However, the colonial government provided the Princely states with loans, finance and advice. In return the princes acknowledged the sovereignty of the British ruler – hence their own lower designation as 'Princes' – and were commonly bound to supply military forces for the Empire's defence (Buyers, 2008). Within the Punjab, the Maharaja of Kapurthala stood fifth in order among the ruling chiefs.

Tikka Jagatjit Singh ruled Kapurthala from 1890 until his death in 1948. He was noted for his 'wholehearted and thorough co-operation with the British government', and in return was regarded by the British as a progressive ruler ('Punjab State Maharajas'). At the coronation Delhi Durbar in 1911, King George V conferred upon him the title of Knight Grand Commander of the Order of the Star of India. Widely travelled, the Maharaja was personally acquainted with most of the crowned heads of Europe, and also with the presidents of France and the United States. Kapurthala received visits from successive Indian Viceroy's and was also a destination of the Prince of Wales

during his tour of 1921-22 ('Punjab State Maharajahs'). In addition, the state received visits from the majority of India's leading Princes.

The Maharajah was one of the most prominent of the Indian princes to have a non-Indian wife. In 1907 he married the Spanish dancer Anita Delgrada in Paris (Vázquez de Gey). Delgrada's biographer claims that in India she led a life of 'Hunts, banquets, parties and receptions' (Vázquez de Gey). She adds that Delgrada and the Prince became 'famous in Europe' and that whenever they visited 'hoards of photographers were waiting'.

### **Analysis**

*Eine Partie Fischfang Bei Dem Maharadscha von Kapurthala* has many of the standard features of the travelogue. It is comprised largely of long shots, and there is always movement, which is provided by the journey itself, by the activities of the people on the screen, and on occasion by the panning movement of the camera. The film commences with the exotic splendour of the Maharajah and his guests as they travel by elephant to the River Bias. The locals' 'peculiar way of fishing' is covered in some detail: from the careful positioning of their boats and nets, through to a depiction of their catch on shore. There are also ethnographical portraits of Indians. Fatimah Rony argues that the camera in the travelogue often serves as a 'fourth wall, establishing a distant relationship between the spectator and the subject filmed' (Rony, 1996, 83). An example in this film is provided by footage of a siesta, in which the camera pans intrusively across the Maharajah's serving men, some of whom find it unavoidable to stare back at it. The viewing experience here is akin to looking at these people through one-way glass.

Nevertheless, there are also divergences from the standard viewpoint of the travelogue in this film. Rony argues that travelogues can be distinguished from contemporary anthropological films due to the fact that they regularly feature European visitors on screen (Rony, 1996, 83). The European travellers help to bridge the fourth wall, serving as visible accomplices of the camera crew in their tour through foreign lands. They also provide figures with whom the viewer – the armchair traveller – can identify (Rony, 1996, 83). However, in this film the Europeans who are witnessed do not appear to be part of the cameraman's party and are instead filmed as being part of the spectacle. They are first seen sat alongside the Maharajah during the siesta. Later, at the River Bias, the cameraman films the Maharajah and his European guests in a long shot and then pans around 90° to reveal the fishermen. The river in this sequence is seen to provide a social barrier. The camera crew



and the Maharajah's party are on one side of the river; the opposite bank is the preserve of scattered crowds of locals and their cattle.

Nevertheless, despite being on the same side of the river, the filmmakers remain apart from the Maharajah's party. One possible explanation for this separation is that this film constituted part of the media circus surrounding the Prince's marriage to Anita Delgrada. The evidence here is inconclusive, however. Although European women sit either side of the Prince during the siesta, it is not clear if one of these is his Spanish wife, and the intertitles give no indication of her presence. It should also be noted that the bulk of the film is not devoted to the Prince's party, but instead to the skills of the local fishermen. Moreover, the camera crew is discreet in their treatment of the Maharajah and his party: they are not subject to the same scrutiny as occurs in the intrusive shots of the serving men and fishermen.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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## Titles

**FAIR CITY OF UDAIPUR**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/857>

\* Series Title:

SECRETS OF INDIA

## Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Running Time:

10 minutes

\* Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

\* Colour:

Black/White

\* Sound:

Sound

\* Footage:

800

## Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

Great Britain

\* Director

BARKAS, Geoffrey

\* Photography

BONNETT, S.R.

\* Production Company

Gaumont-British Picture Corporation

*Synopsis*

TRAVELOGUE. The city of Udaipur, India. BBFC certificate (13). Series and main title (36). Credits (54). Map showing the location of the city (72). XLS through a grove of palm trees of the city. The commentary outlines the tradition and role of the Maharana of Udaipur (112). Pan from roof top of palace of the city (158). The Elephant Gate to the city (170). Main street scenes (240). An elephant outside the Temple of Juggernaut (262). CU of the details of the temple (292). Steps to the temple (307). MS of carved elephant (324). Holy men at the foot of the temple - referred to as

Sadoos (354). The market at the foot of the temple (372). A man sharpens a sword on a lathe which is operated by a woman pulling on a leather belt (446). Further street scenes (468). CU of silverwork (496). CU of a moneychanger counting out coins (505). MS of his 'safe deposit'; a large step he sits on has a metal door which he unlocks and removes a sack of coins; money is exchanged (581). Five women - agricultural workers from the outlying area resting with stacks of hay brought into the city to sell. The women are referred to as 'Beels' (?) (657). Lake Pichola viewed from the Palace (677). Travelling shot along the banks showing men bathing and children playing (727). LS of a waterseller refilling his buckets (747). LS of the Summer Palace on the lake (760). XLS of the city seen through the grove of palms; a herd of camels pass (800ft).

### *Context*

*The Fair City of Udaipur* formed part of the 'Secrets of India' series, produced by the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation in 1934. These educational geography films were the by-product of the company's involvement in a filmed flight over Mount Everest, footage of which appeared as *Wings Over Everest* (1934) (Low, 2005, 61). Among the crew were the cameraman S. R. Bonnett and director Geoffrey Barkas, who were also responsible for *The Fair City of Udaipur*. Several of the 'Secrets of India' series films were re-edited by Gaumont in 1937, when this documentary was re-issued as *A Central Indian Town: Udaipur*.

The city of Udaipur is in the state of Rajasthan in western India. It was founded by Maharana Udai Singh as the capital city of the Kingdom of Mewar following the fall of the former capital, Chittor, to Mughals in 1568. Udaipur is located in a mountainous region, which rendered the city safer from the attacks of mounted Mughal warriors. The kingdom nevertheless suffered continued attacks from its neighbours. During the early nineteenth century the Mewar rulers petitioned the British *raj* for protection. This was granted in 1818 when Udaipur was established as one of the Princely states of British India.

The Mewar family is the oldest royal family in the world, ultimately claiming descent from the sun god (Meininger, 2000, ix). They are pre-eminent among the Rajput clan of Indian Hindu princes. According to Barbara Ramusack their status was founded on two main points: first, they refused to give daughters in marriage to Muslim rulers; second, they chose death, rather than dishonour, when faced with defeat in battle (Ramusack, 2004, 18-19).

The ruling prince at the time that this film was made was Bhupal Singh Mewar. He succumbed to tuberculosis at the age of sixteen, and spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. The Maharana was considered to be an enlightened ruler, and he was responsible for modernising the administration of the state (Meininger, 2000, 142). He was involved in the meetings leading up to the independence of India, and was at the forefront of leading the Rajput states into the new Indian Union (Meininger, 2000, 147).

Ramusack has nevertheless described Udaipur as being 'arguably the most conservative state in Rajpunta' (2004, 226). She recounts that during the inter-war period the state witnessed peasant protests, during which there were campaigns against 'arbitrary taxes, cesses [taxes] , and the demand for begar [forced labour]' (2004, 226). The Bhils, a tribal people classed as untouchables, were prominent in these disputes.

Udaipur is famous for its architecture and landscaping, its attractions including the City Palace, the Juggernaut (Jagdish) Temple, and Lake Pichola and its Lake Palace. The city was in a fairly dilapidated state during the mid-twentieth century but following independence it embraced a role as a tourist destination. The Lake Palace was restored and now operates as a luxury hotel. The city has subsequently served as the backdrop to many film and TV productions, including *Octopussy*, *The Jewel in the Crown*, *Gandhi*, as well as numerous Bollywood films.

### *Analysis*

The commentator of *The Fair City of Udaipur* invites the viewer to witness the 'India of your dreams'. Two presumptions are made regarding the image of India that the spectator has in their minds. The first is of a city of exotic architecture: we witness the 'elaborately carved' Temple of Juggernaut; the 'cool beauty' of Lake Pichola; and the glory of the Summer Palace, which 'gleams like a jewel on the bosom of the lake'. The second presumed image is of a land of impoverished locals. The Maharana of Udaipur approved this film, and it climaxes by stating that 'the descendent of the sun god could find no fairer dwelling place under the sun'; however, at no point is the Prince present in the picture. Instead, we get to see a city that is occupied by street traders, beggars, and 'a race of aborigines'.

The film portrays these two elements in contrasting manners. The commentary is effusive about the architectural beauty of the city. Correspondingly, the cameraman adopts positions that help to portray the buildings in their full majesty. They are sometimes shot from below looking upwards, or they are carefully framed by filming through elaborately carved windows or archways. In contrast, he

commonly films the locals from eye level, or even looks down on them. The contrast between the impoverished locals and these splendid buildings is underlined in the commentary. We are informed that the temple was not made by those who are now present, but by 'craftsmen of long ago'. Udaipur is represented as a city of contrasts - 'rich and poor, humble and mighty' – the riches are represented by buildings and the poverty by the people.

The locals are also pictured among their own 'tangled streets' where they undertake their 'cottage-door industries'. Here the commentary occasionally becomes condescending, most notably in its treatment of a money-lender who is shown performing his business in the open air. Ironic references are made to his 'imposing premises', his 'strong-room' and his 'big deal[s]'. The commentator is less mirthful in his treatment of the Bhils. Several women of the tribe are pictured bringing crops to market. The camerawork and the commentary pay attention to their clothing and jewellery, and the viewer is informed that 'the many anklets worn by this woman are not a sign of vanity, but of safety first – they protect her against snake bite while working in the fields'. There is no information, however, about the Bhil people's social status or about the recent protests in which they had been involved.

The film is more interested in providing us with the images of Udaipur than it is in providing any background history. There is some information regarding the fighting traditions of the Mewar people and about the Maharana's status among adherents of the Hindu faith, but this is far as it goes. The information about the Maharana is immediately followed by the main emphasis of the film: 'no city could be more lovely'. It should be admitted, however, that this loveliness is portrayed effectively. The camerawork is sophisticated and the film is well edited and structured. The film closes with a scene that neatly echoes its beginning; and the Bhils can be witnessed in a street scene which prefigures the focus upon the women later on in the documentary. The filmmakers could be criticised for their over-employment of screen wipes and dissolves, which now appear dated. The music on the soundtrack has also aged poorly: Robin Baker argues that it 'grates slightly with its multi-purpose somewhere-east-of-Suez orientalism' (Baker). It does however effectively punctuate each scene.

The film first states of Udaipur that 'little is heard of it in the outside world'; however, this meditation upon the charms of the city foreshadows Udaipur's later manifestation as a tourist's dream.

**Richard Osborne (August 2009)**

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Ramusack, Barbara, N., *The Indian Princes and Their States* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004).

FILM TITLE:

**FEEDING OF THE POOR IN RANGOON**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2904>

PRODUCTION DATE:

18/10/1945

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

War Office Directorate of Public Relations

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

SEAC Film Unit

SHORT SUMMARY:

Footage showing the feeding of the poor as part of the Buddhist Festival of Lights in Rangoon, shortly after the resumption of British civil administration in Burma.

FULL SUMMARY:

At Turtle Tank Park in Rangoon civilians mount a stage set with low tables and food. Medium and close shots of people, including children and infants, eating from bowls. A line of people are issued with something (cheroots?). A crowd clamours for flags which serve as meal tickets. More flags are given out. Two men with plates and people eating and queuing in the background. A female dancer performs a pwe or traditional dance. Closer shot of the dancer. Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, recently returned Governor of Burma, arrives in China Street, Rangoon, and is greeted (by leaders of the Chinese community?). Good shots of a Chinese dragon dance.

NOTES:

The Buddhist Festival of Lights, or Thadingyut, marks the end of a three-month period of Vassa, sometimes referred to as the 'Rains Retreat' or 'the Buddhist Lent'.

For further coverage, see related items.

RELATED ITEMS:

IWM film JFU 408.

IWM film JFU 411

PDF:

[Read PDF - 1](#)

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Wilson, A (Sergeant): cameraman.

## ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

## FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

35mm

## NUMBER OF REELS:

1

## LENGTH:

284 ft

## RUNNING TIME:

4 mins

## BLACK &amp; WHITE / COLOUR:

B&amp;W

## SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

*Context*

Reginald Dorman-Smith became Governor of Burma on 6 May 1941. He enjoyed his initial period in office and had admiration for the Burmese politicians he worked with (Taylor, 2004, 431). The Governor was in favour of self-government at a future date and under his administration Burmese politicians were given powers in all areas except defence, foreign affairs, finance, and control of the frontier areas (Taylor, 2004, 431)

In 1942 Japanese forces invaded Burma and forced the British to retreat from the country. Dorman-Smith's administration operated in exile from Simla, India. It would be May 1945 before Rangoon, Burma's largest city, was recaptured by Allied forces. Burma had faced the longest single military campaign of World War II. The military administration that took temporary control of the country reported that 'We do not think it any exaggeration to say that no British possession has suffered so much damage' (quoted in Collis, 1956, 253). Dorman-Smith argued that it would take a period of British rule, lasting between five and seven years, in order to rebuild the country (Ward Fay, 363-64)

In the wake of the liberation of Rangoon the British government issued a White Paper, which promised Burma a 'status equal to that of the Dominions' (quoted in Comstock, 1946, 239). This goal was laid out in stages. The British Governor's period of direct rule was to last for three years; and then representatives of all parties would be asked to draw up a democratic constitution, which



would need to be ratified by the British government. These measures were unsatisfactory to Burmese nationalists, who demanded greater clarity regarding the proposals in the White Paper and an earlier date for independence.

Dorman-Smith first returned to Rangoon on 16 October 1945, two days before the rushes that comprise this film were shot. He was accompanied by his wife who, on viewing the city, judged it to be 'a shambles' (quoted in Collis, 1956, 254). The Governor was welcomed by moderate Burmese officials, but Aung San, the influential leader of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), declined to meet him. Although Dorman-Smith had intimated that independence could be achieved at an earlier date than proposed in the White Paper, the AFPFL denounced his plans. They demanded control of the Governor's council and an immediate guarantee of self-government (Thomson, 1957, 300). When Dorman-Smith refused these demands he was labelled a fascist.

Dorman-Smith's council and the AFPFL entered a period of stalemate, and the Governor eventually saw the need for his own replacement (Collis, 1956, 278). In August 1946 he was succeeded by Hubert Rance, who governed Burma until its date of independence, 4 January 1948. During this period Aung San was assassinated by political rivals. The Independent Union of Burma chose not to become a member of the British Commonwealth.

Dorman-Smith was in favour of documenting Burmese life. During the war he had visited London and pleaded the Burmese cause. According to Maurice Collis he had proposed the making of documentary films, arguing that they 'might make the Burmese more real in the public mind' (Collis, 1956, 211). It was the governor's belief that 'If people saw how charming and human they were, sympathy would be aroused and their problems better understood' (*ibid.*). The rushes that comprise this film were shot by Sgt. Wilson of the South East Asia Command (SEAC) film unit. His film covers two combined events. The first is what the Burmese termed the feeding of 'all comers from the 4 corners': the distribution of food to the poor, irrespective of creed, caste or religion. The second is the Burmese/Chinese festival of lights, the three-day festival that marks the anniversary of the return of Buddha from the celestial abode.

### **Analysis**

The rushes that comprise Sgt. Wilson's brief film show some of the diversity of Burmese life in the aftermath of the British recapture of Rangoon. They capture the distribution of food to the poor,

the traditional dances of Burmese and Chinese residents, and the formalities that were accorded to British officialdom.

It is evident that there were many poor who were in need of food. The distribution takes place in various places, including one of Rangoon's parks, where we witness food being given to men, women and children alike. This task is being carried out by the Burmese themselves. They serve the food and they also operate a ticketing system. The footage depicting the latter is curious. Here a solitary Burmese man hands out flags that entitle the poor to their free food. He is soon surrounded by a frantic group, who quickly lose patience, and in the end snatch the flags from him. He appears to be quite genial about this. In addition, a merrily laughing crowd has witnessed this spectacle. In this throng there are both locals and allied soldiers.

It is also curious that this distribution of food is combined with celebration. Taking place in the same park is a traditional Burmese Pwe dance, performed for the festival of lights. Here a young girl in traditional Burmese costume uses a fan as she dances on stage for a large crowd of male onlookers.

The final ingredient added to this mix is the presence of Governor of Burma and his wife. They performed various formal duties following their return to Rangoon (Collis, 1956, 254-55), and in these rushes they can be seen attending the festival of lights in the Chinese district of Rangoon. What Sgt. Wilson describes as a 'brief visit' begins with them disembarking from their large car and being warmly greeted by Chinese dignitaries, the majority of whom are dressed in western suits and ties. They are then placed as guests of honour for a dragon dance. Here the Buddhist festival is presented directly to the British party. The Governor and his wife are seated in front of the dancers; meanwhile a large Burmese/Chinese crowd looks on from a less advantageous position.

The Dorman-Smiths are also prioritised in the rushes shot by the SEAC film unit. A separate film (JFU 408), shot by Capt. Lawson, also captures this dragon dance. Lawson's notes state that 'Sgt. Wilson covered this story from the front'. Meanwhile further rushes shot by Wilson on the same day (JFU 411) show the Governor and his wife attending a ceremony that combines festival dancing with the feeding of the poor. Also from the same day Sgt. E.E. Miller filmed their party attending the Kyaikasan Races in Rangoon (JFU 409). Each of these films captures the reception given to the Governor and his wife by the officials and the people of Rangoon. What is missing is any film record of the reactions of those who did not wish to greet the returning Dorman-Smiths.

**Richard Osborne (September 2009)**

*Works cited*

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Comstock, Alzada, 'British Plans for the Empire', *Current History*, 10/55 (March 1946), 238-43.

Taylor, R. H. 'Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith', in *Southeast Asia: A Historical Encyclopedia, from Angkor Wat to East Timor*, ed. by Keat Gin Ooi (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 431.

Thomson, John Seabury, 'The AFPFL-Continuity in Burmese Politics', *Antioch Review*, 17/3 (September 1957), 297-313.

FILM TITLE:

**FIJI RETURN**

WEB ADDRESS:

<http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5734>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1945

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

New Realm

SHORT SUMMARY:

Incomplete version (the beginning is missing) of a film about the return home of Fijian soldiers who took part in the Pacific War.

FULL SUMMARY:

Scenes of peacetime Fijian life cut with record of the Fijian soldiers advancing on Bougainville through shell-blasted jungle. First aid is received by one soldier. The Fijians creep forward. Mortar fire. soldiers pinned down waiting for relief; wounded shipped out under covering fire. At Suva in Fiji, the governor Philip Mitchell and Rahu Siguna welcome home the returnees; they drive off in lorries to camp. A meal is prepared. Reunion with wives and children; boys listen to tales of battle. Rugby match, market scenes. Some of the men depart for Lao in the east. Ceremonial kava (drink); feast, presentation of gifts, ethnic dancing. "In hundreds of villages Fijian women are dancing to welcome home the greatest jungle fighters in the Pacific."

NOTES:

Length: the film can suggests that this is reel two only, and that the film has a combined footage of 2572 ft. There are no titles. However, since FIJI RETURN is marked in Thorpe and Pronay as lasting 13 minutes, it would seem that virtually the whole film is here, minus credits and titles. The can is marked "Science Museum SM 6".

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

UPU

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/N

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

## LENGTH:

1159 ft

## RUNNING TIME:

13 mins

## BLACK &amp; WHITE / COLOUR:

B&amp;W

## SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

## LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

## LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

None

## LANGUAGE OF SUBTITLES:

None

*Context*

When Fiji became a British colony in 1874 the British operated a system of indirect rule in which the British Governor worked in consultation with village chiefs. There was a policy of preserving native traditions (McIntyre, 2001, 668). Yet, by the end of the decade, the British had created their first sugar plantations, whose produce was aimed predominantly at the Australian market. Here they disallowed the use of Fijian labour, due to the islanders' tradition of subsistence agriculture, and instead brought in contracted Indian workers (McIntyre, 2001, 668-69). Indians soon made up a substantial proportion of the population, leading to continuing political tensions.

At the outbreak of World War II British forces were primarily engaged with the campaign in Europe. There was concern, however, regarding the vulnerability of the Pacific colonies in the face of the Japanese threat. As a result military responsibility for Fiji and Tonga was transferred to New Zealand command. Following the rapid advances of the Japanese in the South Pacific, including the invasion of the nearby Solomon Islands, the American military established a base on Fiji and, in turn, assumed military control of the islands. According to historian Ashley Jackson there were some 'abrasive clashes' between the British and Americans regarding policy in the area and, as a result, the British selected the skilled diplomat Sir Philip Mitchell as Governor of Fiji (Jackson, 2006, 520).

The military action in this film is concentrated on Bougainville, the largest of the Solomon Islands, which at the time formed part of the Australian territory of New Guinea. The fighting here took place in several stages, from November 1943 to August 1945, and employed American, Australian, and Fijian troops. Native Fijians, who were known for their traditions of warfare, were recruited by appealing to their belief that battle was 'honourable, noble and brave' (Jackson, 2006, 521). They were informed by Philip Mitchell that the war was being fought 'to preserve for you the freedom to live your lives according to the traditions and ceremonies you so rightly value very highly' (Jackson, 2006, 521). By 1945 the Fiji Military Force (FMF) numbered 6000 men. This figure included 590 seconded from the New Zealand Army, but only a small minority of Indian descent (Jackson, 2006, 520). Loyalty was rewarded with the granting of further power to the village chiefs.

*Fiji Returns*, was produced by the company New Realm for the British Ministry of Information in 1945. The film was directed by Sylvia Cummins, who made other wartime documentaries for the same company, including *Report From Burma* and *Indians in Action*. The copy held in the Imperial War Museum is incomplete and there is little apparent documentation regarding the distribution of the film. The National Archives do not appear to hold any information relating to it, and its intended audience is unknown.

### **Analysis**

*Fiji Return* is a film of stark contrasts. It depicts the Pacific islands of Fiji as a demi-paradise, and the Pacific Islands of Bougainville as a stark battleground. There is a clear and admitted difference in the way that these two locations are shot. The footage filmed on Fiji is carefully orchestrated – both visually and musically. Meanwhile, the footage on Bougainville is rough and ready; it is shot in the thick of the action. What makes the film effective, however, is the way in which it manages to link these two places. We learn that the women of Fiji are thinking of the war experiences of their men, and we see the men communicate their experiences when they return to their home island. Moreover, the sexual bond between the men and women is implicit throughout. There is a longing in the way that the Fijian women look out to sea. We also get to witness the coy first contact as the soldiers and their women are reunited. In this segment we also witness the babies that have been born while the soldiers were in the field. A further factor that helps to dovetail the two types of footage is the way in which the film is edited. The dramatic images of the Bougainville battle are not situated as the climax to the film, instead they arrive half-way through (or, more correctly, half-way through the footage that remains).

The film thus has a tripartite structure: it shows the partners of the soldiers, then the soldiers in battle, and then the reunion upon the soldiers' return. It does not correspond with dialectical notions of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, however. The battles have not been resolved; we are informed that 'other Fijian forces are still in action'. In fact, the most powerful result of placing the military action in the middle of this documentary is to illustrate how much a part of daily life the fighting now is. It has also affected daily life, creating a degree of separation between the men and women. After having seen the graphic military action, we are shown one of the returning soldiers visiting a knitting circle. Here it is underscored just how different the lives of the men and women have become. The film closes with a group of soldiers returning to their village and being accorded a celebratory feast. The men do not sit with their women, but are instead placed apart as guests of honour.

The commentary informs us that the military footage is an 'uncut record' of a band of Fijian soldiers as they advance against the Japanese. Therefore we get a full account of a small segment of the World War II campaign in the Pacific. The cameraman is with these soldiers as they come under fire and he also helps them to fetch supplies of grenades. We see the soldiers' injuries and both their bravery and their fear. There is an immediacy to this impressively captured footage, and its authenticity is underlined by the inclusion of intertitles featuring the cameraman's reports. What we do not get is any explanation of the overall military strategy. We are told that the Fijian soldiers are 'decent fighters, perfectly fit and beautifully trained', but we do not learn why they should wish to support the campaign. We also get to see the New Zealand Commanding Officer and some New Zealand troops, but learn nothing more of the structure of command.

Similarly, life in Fiji is shown in fragments and it is not contextualised. There is a brief depiction of the mixed European/Indian/Fijian life in a town and we glimpse a game of rugby football. We are quickly informed, however, that 'the real life of Fiji is in the villages'. From hereon there is a focus on the traditions of the native islanders. We witness tribal dancing and music, and the preparation and consumption of a 'patriotic' feast, including the narcotic soup of kava. In this British film there is no condescension towards the traditions of Fiji. The islanders are not shown in need of aid, technology or political interference. There are a few shots of the British governor, Sir Philip Mitchell, awaiting the return of the first battalion of troops, but greater screen time is awarded to the local chief, Rahu Siguna. The British are barely mentioned; instead the term 'Allied' is more frequently used. Ultimately, what comes across most strongly in this film of contrasts and linkages

are the common feelings experienced by soldiers and their partners no matter where they are in the world.

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CCE 334

<b>Film Title</b>	<b>FORTRESS CEYLON</b>
<b>Web Address</b>	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5745">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5745</a>
<b>Production Date</b>	1945
<b>Production Country</b>	India
<b>Production Sponsor</b>	Public Relations India Command
<b>Production Company</b>	Army Film Centre, India
<b>Production Credits</b>	Langley, Bryan (Captain): script Langley, Bryan (Captain): direction Langley, Bryan (Captain): cameraman
<b>Film/Video Format</b>	P 1/35/N
<b>Number of Reels</b>	1
<b>Length</b>	815 ft
<b>Running Time</b>	9 mins
<b>Black &amp; White/Colour</b>	B&W
<b>Silent/Sound</b>	comopt
<b>Language of Soundtrack</b>	English

**Language of Main Titles** English

**Language of Subtitles** None

**Context Date** 1939=1944

**Index:** LK.N

**Units/Organisations** GB.N & Fleet Air Arm  
LK.O & Civil Defence Forces

**Index: Objects** agriculture, Ceylonese - tropical  
aircraft, British - combat: Hawker Hurricane & [Ceylonese]  
aircraft, United States - combat: Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat & [Ceylonese]  
combat, Japanese - air raid [D]  
journalism and record, Ceylonese: Ceylon Observer  
society, Ceylonese - domestic

**Index: Places** Sri Lanka (Ceylon)

**Access Conditions** IWM

### Synopsis

A view of Ceylon towards the end of the war, looking back over the period of defensive war, and at the current preparations for the offensive.

General material on Ceylon's religions and economy (tea, rubber, rice) is followed by an introduction to one particular middle-class family. Front pages of *Ceylon Observer* trace opening of War; local and Empire troops, the civilian defence forces (various members of the family now seen as firemen, plot-room girl etc), and Fleet Air Arm all 'waiting for the Japs'. A good sequence on the Japanese air raid of 5 April 1942: aerial combat, ARP warden, ambulance/fire crews, shot down Japanese planes. Defence stays at the ready, although war situation eases: preparations for

the offensive go ahead. Ceylon provides jungle training ground for troops of the United Nations; supply convoys (Ceylon naval launch patrol); Air Force Hurricanes, FAA Martlets – closing sequence shows loading and aiming of a heavy gun, while commentary talks of task ahead.

### Notes

Remarks: because the war is not over, the film rather falls apart after the air raid: the closing minutes, in spite of the commentary, feel rather like an anti-climax.

Credits: derived from interview with Bryan Langley by Philip Woods (letter of 8 November 2000).

### Context

According to B. D. Garga, Indian documentary film could be ‘described as a war baby, conceived by the British and nurtured by the Indians’ (Garga, 1987, 26). In the early years of World War II the British government instituted the Film Advisory Board, whose mission was ‘to produce films that would publicise the urgency and the requirements of the war-situation, and would appeal for popular support’ (Roy, 2002, 239). On 1 February 1943 the Government of India assumed direct control of this organisation, forming three new companies: Information Films of India, Indian News Parade and the Army Film Centre. Propaganda values were maintained. It has been argued that the majority of the films produced by these companies were made with the aim of trying ‘to dragoon an unwilling nation into the war’ (Narwekar, 1992, 23). Made by the Army Film Centre in 1945, *Fortress Ceylon* details the history and loyalty of Ceylon during the War. However it was not only created to boost Indian morale, as the film was also widely distributed abroad, including France, Belgium and Italy (*Hansard*, 17 January 1945).

Both India and Ceylon achieved independence in the aftermath of World War II. What is distinctive about Ceylon is that independence was ‘transferred through the electoral process’ and that this transfer was ‘peaceful’ (de Silva, K.M., 1981, 449). In part, this was due to the War itself. The island was of strategic importance: it became a target for the Japanese; provided a naval base for Allied forces; provided natural resources for the war effort; and was home to the headquarters of South East Asia Command. Such was the significance of Ceylon that the island’s civilian government was subordinated to military command. Ceylonese members of the government nevertheless supported the war cause. In return for such loyalty the British authorities on the island supported the campaign for self-rule (de Silva, K.M., 1981, 450-51).

This is to oversimplify matters, however. Ceylon was a diverse and occasionally discordant country, split along ethnic, caste and religious lines (de Silva, Chandra, 1987, 216-18). Colonial presence had complicated this mix, importing low-caste Tamils to the island to work on the tea plantations. Those campaigning for reform were themselves split, with various parties campaigning on different policies. Led by D. S. Senanayake, Ceylonese members of the government campaigned for Dominion status, while the Marxist and anti-war Lanka Sama Samaj Party (LSSP) wanted complete independence. The British government imprisoned the party's leaders in 1940, only for them to escape to India during the bombardment of Ceylon. During their absence the nationalist Communist Party usurped much of the LSSP's support.

The war had a dramatic effect on the Ceylonese economy. On the one hand, unemployment was alleviated as people worked either directly or indirectly for the war effort. 26,000 Ceylonese volunteered for the army alone. Most were employed in motor transport or clerical work, due to what was believed to be 'their high standard of education and poor physique' (Jackson, 2006, 318). On the other hand, there was severe inflation, which led to discontent among working-class and white collar workers (de Silva, K.M. 1981, 476). Ashley Jackson concluded that the war 'deeply affected home society', as it led to greater social mobility (Jackson, 2006, 319).

### *Analysis*

*Fortress Ceylon* serves a number of overlapping purposes. First, it introduces us to the country and people of Ceylon. Secondly, having introduced us to the people it informs us of their contribution to the war effort. Thirdly, the island's strategic importance is stressed. The film argues that the Ceylonese gave wholehearted support to the war effort 'just like people everywhere else in British territories'.

At the beginning of the film we are shown the geographical, cultural and economic diversity of Ceylon. We first see mountainous jungle and then a local man praying before a statue of Buddha. This religious image is contrasted with three images of Ceylonese women. Two of the women are situated culturally by the fact that they are shown eating local produce, a banana and a coconut. The third provides a further contrast. The previous images have been shot in the countryside, but she is standing on a city street. Her sophistication is illustrated by the fact that she wears sunglasses. Meanwhile, the commentary emphasises harmony. It informs us that 'Ceylon is an island of many peoples. People with different histories, traditions, religions and politics and yet in all her towns and villages these people live side by side in peace'.

After being told about the diversity of the island we are then paradoxically shown a ‘typical’ Ceylonese family, the Mutis. This westernised family is far from average; they belong to the ‘elite’, a group that in Chandra Richard de Silva’s opinion ‘was small enough for virtually every member in it to know most of the others’ (de Silva, Chandra Richard, 1987, 216). We witness the Mutis in positions of power at work, we see them receive the benefits of higher education, and we encounter the privileged indulgence of their leisure time. Thus the island’s resources and natural beauty are shown to best advantage. The Mutis provide a example of compliant Ceylonese during the War. The commentary had previously stated that prior to hostilities ‘life went on as usual’, indicating both the pre-modernity of pre-War Ceylon and the fact that conflict will bring changes. However, what we witness here is a continuation of the status quo. The family’s position of power is reflected in their wartime activity. A sequence in which one of Mr Muti’s sons had provided guidance to tea clippers is now mirrored by one in which Mr Muti ushers the local population into air raid shelters. By focussing on this family the film avoids the complications that a sustained survey of the island’s diversity would bring. We hear nothing of the political opposition and opportunities that the war helped to incubate.

The latter half of the film moves away from individuals and returns to the documentary aesthetic, giving a fairly dry account of Ceylon at war. First, we are shown the defence of the island. Here the film depicts the islanders assuming a greater degree of responsibility. We begin with the British forces in action, defending the island from attack; the Ceylonese meanwhile perform back-up duties. However, later on we see Ceylonese in positions that the Allied troops had originally filled – they now assume the responsibility for the anti-aircraft guns.

Following the bombardment of the island in April 1942, the Japanese military threat did not re-materialise. In line with Ceylon’s wartime role the emphasis of this film changes. We move from preparations for defence towards preparations for attack. The film concludes where it started, but somewhat anticlimactically, with jungle terrain. We are informed of the island’s similarity to Burma and its suitability as a practice ground for the battles taking place there. By the War’s end *Fortress Ceylon* has been transformed into a training camp. Nevertheless, the film continues to press home its message. The harmony within the indigenous population is now extended to the Allied troops: we are shown representatives from diverse nations, promenading arm-in-arm.

**Richard Osborne (May 2009)**

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**GARDENS OF THE ORIENT**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/23>

Title Ref:

Director:

Prod. Country : GB

Year: 1936

1st Release: 1936

Prod. Company: GPO Film Unit

Release Country: GB

Release date: 1936

Format: 35 D-BETA

Run Time (Mins): 10

Length: 936 Feet 285 Metres

Colour Code: B

Colour System:

Sound System: SOUN

Language: ENG

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

#### Credits

Production Company GPO Film Unit

Reconstructed and edited Gaumont-British Screen Services

Recorded on British Acoustic Full Range System

#### Synopsis

The tea-gardens of India and Ceylon.

Aerial view of countryside around the tea-gardens (54). The Kangchenjunga mountain railway is followed on its journey in the Himalayas. Views of the tea-gardens with waterfalls (118). A European family sit drinking tea in the grounds of their residence. Shots of various families of locals who all work in the plantations (168). The locals' village, illustrating all their different activities, e.g. basket-making, washing their clothes in the stream, barbers at work, the local creche, the children in the classroom and the hospital (269). Payday in the village (288). Elephants clearing away undergrowth and uprooting trees in preparation for cultivation (348). The tea bushes which are

grown for the seed are shown and there is a close-up of a young plant shooting. The bushes are watered (397). The preparation of the draining system is shown, followed by shots of pruning bushes, cutting away old ones, fertilising and applying leaf mould to the roots (443). The bushes are cut and tips of new shoots removed, so that the bushes do not become too high for plucking (467). The leaves are plucked (519). The baskets of leaves are emptied into ox-carts or motorised transport and are taken to the factory where the leaves are turned into tea (572). Withering is the first process, whereby the leaves are left on the hessian shelves until the moisture has dried off (618). The leaves are then spread on rolling tables. Rolling breaks up the cells which produces flavour and colour (674). The twisted leaf is put on an oscillating machine. This breaks up the lumps and disperses the heat. The finer leaves fall through the mesh. The rest are sent back to be rolled again (700). A process of natural fermentation follows. The leaf changes colour. It is then cooked in the firing room at 180F, where it assumes the appearance of black tea (731). Sieving and the use of suction fans dispose of dust. Each grade is sorted (764). Shows 4 lbs. of green leaves which make 1 lb. of tea (782). Graded tea is packed into metal-lined chests. The chests are loaded into lorry, then a train and finally into a boat. Alternatively, they are carried across river or lakes to warehouses. Bullock wagons take them to a liner. The liner takes the cargo aboard at the quayside (903 ft).

### *Context*

Several companies were responsible for bringing the short film *Gardens of the Orient* to fruition. The film emerged in 1936, produced in Britain by the GPO Film Unit, the Post Office's pioneering documentary-making department. According to credits printed in the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, the material was 'reconstructed and edited by Gaumont Screen Services Ltd' (MFB, 1937, 260). This organisation was chiefly responsible for distributing films made by its sister company, Gaumont-British Instructional, a division of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation that specialised in documentary films for the 'educational and industrial market' (Swann, 1989, 51). *Gardens of the Orient* contains footage re-edited from an early Gaumont-British Instructional documentary, *Darjeeling A Foothill Town* (1934). Finally, and most tellingly, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* discloses the fact that the film was distributed by 'The Empire Tea Market Expansion Bureau'. It was made available free of charge in the UK and the journal described its purpose as being 'propaganda' (MFB, 1937, 260).

The importation of tea into Britain began in the 1660s but it was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that plantations were created in India and Ceylon, the countries featured in this film. The need for these new plantations grew out of the loss of the British monopoly on the tea trade with China in 1833. Cultivation of the crop first began in the Assam region of India in the 1830s, and it was first planted



in Darjeeling (the location of many of the scenes in this film) in the 1840s ('Darjeeling Tea').

Production in Sri Lanka began later, in the 1860s, the growth of the trade here paralleled by a decline in coffee production.

In both countries the trade was dependent on bringing in workers to the plantation areas. The Assam plantations were originally populated by indentured labourers, drawn mainly from nearby regions of India (Moxham, 2003, 132). The number of workers coming to the plantations was vast, as was the attrition rate caused by the harsh working conditions. Moxham records that between 1863 and 1866 nearly 85,000 labourers came to Assam but by 1866 only 49,750 of them remained. He states that 'The others had either run away and not been recaptured (in which case they probably died in the jungles) or they had died on the estates' (Moxham, 2003, 135). In Ceylon the trade was reliant on Indian Tamils, who originally only journeyed to the country for the harvest season but eventually settled in large numbers. By 1900, 300,000 out of a total population of four million in Ceylon were Indian Tamils (Moxham, 2003, 183-84). Tensions between the Tamils and the native Sinhalese continue to have repercussions. In both countries whole families were employed in the trade, living in basic accommodation on the plantation estates. Children as young as five were employed (Moxham, 2003, 182) and the work was sexually divided: women picked the crop while the men carried out heavier labouring duties.

Conditions for tea workers gradually improved. In India in the 1920s workers began to unionise, fighting for a living wage and to keep the abuses of plantation owners in check. Moxham argues that 'Judged against the poverty of much of India, by the end of British rule the tea estate workers were living a better life than many other workers' (Moxham, 2003, 189). He nevertheless concludes his study stating that 'Tea production was founded on very cheap labour, and continues to rely on very cheap labour' (Moxham, 2003, 215). Production in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), for example, remains subject to methods inherited from the British. Here large families are allocated a single 'line' room to live in, cultivation remains subject to a strict sexual division of labour, and the minimum working age has only risen to twelve (Victor, 10 December 2007).

### *Analysis*

*Gardens of the Orient* is a film of contrasts, some of which it highlights, some of which it attempts to reconcile, and some of which it ignores.

The film's proselytisation for the tea industry is transparent, aiming to show that the production of this crop is as pleasant as its consumption. "Tea", we are informed, 'even the name has a cheerful ring about it'. The film illustrates this harmonious production-consumption process in a strange manner. It begins by highlighting the difference between the gardens of the west – redolent of 'pleasant shade and soft homely colours' - and the 'gardens of the orient' – the tea plantations in India and Ceylon. The film both endorses and undercuts the traditional use of the word 'garden' to describe the tea plantations. 'Garden' removes any idea of exploitation. We are informed that the British plantation owners have worked 'in harmony with the inhabitants of India and Ceylon'; the film maintains that the plantation village is 'a happy place'; and we learn about the free meals, creches, education and medical care that are provided for the labourers. On the other hand, the film cannot help but highlight the difference between the British garden, a place of leisure, and the oriental garden, a place of work. It even juxtaposes a scene of an English-styled garden in India, in which we witness a middle-class British family being served tea by their Indian servants, and scenes shot in a tea plantation, where we are offered ethnographical studies of large Indian families. Moreover, the film reveals the indifference with which these tea planters could be treated. This is evident in its condescending narrative: at one point workers are described as getting ill 'through eating too much curry perhaps'. It is also in evidence in the footage. In one scene workers can be seen lining up for their pay; here an Indian woman is tossed a bag of coins by the plantation owner who doesn't even look at her.

The film contrasts the modern facilities provided by the British with the antiquated daily lives of the Indians. The narrative talks of the 'scrupulous cleanliness' of a tea factory, full of 'British machinery of new design'; similarly, the plantation hospital provided by the British is described as being 'most modern'. In contradistinction, the viewer is informed that 'local laundrymen disdain newfangled methods' (here there are shots of Indian planters washing their clothes in the river). There is also footage of the basic kit of the village barber. The commentary states that he 'airily dispenses with modern tonsorial equipment'.

The film is made up of two contrasting sections. The first shows life on the tea plantations, while the second, longer section outlines the stages of tea cultivation and production. The latter section is thorough in its approach and stands as a valuable document of the processes employed during this period. It covers these processes in great detail, down to the level of the alternative transportation methods employed in various plantations. This is different from the way in which the film illustrates plantation life. Although the film speaks of both Indian and Ceylonese 'gardens' it does not

distinguish between them. Instead, it states simply that 'Indian labour is employed on both Ceylon and Indian tea gardens, to which the families emigrate to find work under pleasant conditions'. The film says nothing of the consequences of bringing labour to each region.

The two sections of the film have an effect on one another. On the one hand, because the study of tea cultivation is authoritative, it lends an unwarranted weight to the subjective account of plantation life. This certainly seems to be the way in which early critics viewed the film. The *Monthly Film Bulletin* summarised that 'The film is coherent, the emphasis, speed of presentation and photography satisfactory' (MFB, 1937, 260). On the other hand, while the narrative stresses the care and attention that are given to workers by the plantation owners, the film's structure suggests otherwise. Viewed today much can be read into the fact that more screen time, and a greater degree of background information, is accorded to the crop than to its pickers

A final contrast lies in the film's production values. The soundtrack features an ersatz oriental soundtrack, its indifferent employment being reflective of the film's viewpoint towards its subjects. The camerawork occasionally belies this attitude, however. Some of the scenes of village life and the villagers are beautifully framed; the photographer grants the workers a dignity that the narrative fails to relay.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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Film Number	<b>GEN 12</b>
Web Address	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5888">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5888</a>
Film Title	the GEN NO 12 [Main]
Production Date	1/1945
Production Country	GB
Production Company	RAF Film Production Unit

I. "S.E.A.C." a. WAAFs arrive (by ship) in India and, as well as starting new duties, do some sightseeing. b. 'Scots' commentary describes bomber (Liberator and Halifax ?) maintenance in the Burma sector and (after film of take-off, flight and action) discusses the "rules" for survival following a jungle crash-landing. An RAF training course teaches crews how to cope with Burmese language, food, poisonous insects, Japanese booby-traps etc. The commentator's aircraft touches down safely.

II. "RAF Warfront." 1 January 1945: Mitchells shown in action; while returning their pilots are told not to land at their usual airfields. Film of wrecked Mitchells etc on airfield in Belgium/Holland sector following German attack. RAF Spitfires retaliate - good footage of dogfights with Me 109s. Messerschmitts crash into the snow; a German pilot bails out; one is shot down over a town; another crash-lands near a tramway. Shots of wrecked aircraft and dead pilots. The "battle of New Year's Day" is a reminder of the dangers of relaxing while the German "tiger" is still active.

### Notes

The raw footage of the SEAC scenes can be found under the references below.

The 'battle of New Year's Day' also known as Operation Bodenplatte or 'Baseplate'.

**References**                      shotsheet

<b>Related Items</b>	IWM film reference ABY 53 - The First Contingent of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force Arrive in India. IWM film reference ABY 55 - Air Road to Mandalay: RAF Liberators of Strategic Air Force, Eastern Air Command. IWM film reference ABY 34 - RAF Jungle School at Mahabaleshwar, Maharashtra, India.
<b>Film/Video Format</b>	P 1/35/N
<b>Number of Reels</b>	2
<b>Length</b>	1294 ft
<b>Running Time</b>	14 mins
<b>Black &amp; White/Colour</b>	B&W
<b>Silent/Sound</b>	comopt
<b>Language of Soundtrack</b>	English
<b>Language of Main Titles</b>	English
<b>Context Date</b>	1945
<b>Index:</b>	GB.F
<b>Units/Organisations</b>	
<b>Access Conditions</b>	IWM

### *Context*

The 'Gen' series of films, subtitled 'Voice of the Service', were produced by the RAF Film Production Unit during World War II for screening to RAF personnel at home and overseas. The films contained a combination of news items and general information or 'gen' in RAF slang. *Gen*

12, produced in January 1945, features two separate films, the first of which concerns RAF activities in India and Burma.

This section is titled 'S.E.A.C.', after South-East Asia Command, the body in charge of Allied operations in South-East Asia during World War II. It dovetails three separate stories: the arrival of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in India in late 1944; the aerial bombardment of Burma; and details of a training camp that provides guidance for those stranded in the Burmese jungle. This material has been edited from rushes shot by RAF Film Production Unit cameramen, whose 'dopesheets' provided the factual basis for the voiceover added at Pinewood Studios in England.

The WAAF was created in June 1939 to serve as the female auxiliary of the Royal Air Force. At its peak strength in July 1943 it comprised nearly 182,000 women, representing 16 per cent of total RAF numbers (Escott, 2003, 38). Total numbers abroad never exceeded 9,000, however, and no more than 800 served in India at any given time (Escott, 2003, 33). The first WAAFs to serve in India arrived in Bombay in November 1944. They were employed in support work for the allied air forces, with roles ranging from catering to aircraft control.

Ashley Jackson has described Burma as being a 'low-priority British colony until it became one of the Empire's major battlegrounds in the Second World War' (Jackson, 2006, 386). Despite being a part of the Empire since 1886 Burma had only recently come under direct British control, having been administered as a province of India until 1937. The capture of Burma in May 1942 represented the furthest extent of the Japanese incursion into Britain's South-East Asian Empire during World War II. Jackson has argued that among the dominant ethnic group, the Burmans, some 'were actively anti-British and willing to work with the Japanese' (Jackson, 2006, 386). Other ethnic groups, including the Karens, Chins, Kachines and Nagas, 'were loyal to the British, or opposed to Japanese or Burman influence, and therefore prepared to support them' (Jackson, 2006, 386).

### *Analysis*

Although its main purpose is as an information film, the 'S.E.A.C.' section of Gen 12 employs some sophisticated and novel film techniques. Most of these are occasioned by a desire to smooth the transition between its component parts. The link between the WAAF story and the aerial bombardment of Burma is achieved by showing the men that the WAAF will be working alongside priming the bomber planes in preparation for the attack. The link between the bombardment and

the training camp section is achieved by imagining the situation that the crew would encounter should they crash into the jungle.

Dominating all this is the commentary. Although the film begins with a third party narrator, from halfway through the WAAF section onwards it uses the voices of the RAF crew to elucidate the action. This device is employed to help the film hang together, the dialogue giving the impression that these characters are moving from scene to scene. Unfortunately, this conceit produces disjunctions of its own. In the aerial bombardment section the dialogue is linked with point-of-view shots. However, the surrounding footage requires them to take an omniscient position. Although the dialogue is scripted and is presumably spoken by actors, the use of 'authentic' voices does facilitate a more casual use of language than is common in military documentaries. One airman is referred to as a 'clot' (this is Pilot Officer Prune, originally a character in the RAF's 'Tee Emm' magazine), and we are informed that the WAAF will find the locals 'a whole lot darker' than the men that they are used to back home.

The desire for continuity is in evidence throughout. The WAAF section includes a brisk travelogue. WAAF officers walk through each setting and, as they do so, they help to blend the transition from one scene to another. Against a background of Asian-styled music we see an ancient India untouched by war: there is Mughal architecture, snake charming, camel riding, a beggar, and a bazaar.

Elsewhere the War dominates the film. The scenes of army activity in the WAAF are reflective of colonial hierarchy. Here a lone British soldier provides guidance to a group of Indians who are doing the heavy work of loading bombs onto aeroplanes. In contrast, the training camp section is notable for its positive portrayal of Burmese help. The Burmese are shown in a position of authority as they instruct the Allied forces about jungle survival. They provide translations and 'useful tips', including how to manufacture various devices out of bamboo. In this film it is 'the Japs' alone who are regarded as the enemy. While the Burmese use bamboo to trap wildlife, the Japanese are portrayed as having crafted it to create vicious man-traps.

**Richard Osborne (May 2009)**

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Jackson, Ashley, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (Hambledon Continuum, 2006).



**GIBRALTAR**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4875>

Title Ref: Sift 219057

Director:

Prod. Country : GB

Year: 1911

1st Release : 1911

Prodn. Company: Rosie Film Company

Release Country: GB

Format: 35

Run Time (Mins):

Length: 220 Feet 67 Metres

Colour Code: B

Colour System:

Sound System: SLNT

Language:

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

## Credits

Production Company Rosie Film Company

Photography ROSENTHAL, Joseph

## NFA Synopsis

INTEREST. Travelogue. Scenes in Gibraltar.

Main title and credit (1). Pan right from sea of the town of Gibraltar (33). Street scenes with pedestrians and army officers with black armbands (52); further street scenes (71); military band and troops march down street (89). Pan right of harbour with small boats, steam yacht and fishing craft, and the quay (133). Market scenes; the stalls (144); market traders (152); a bric-a-brac market (161). HAS taken from the Rock of the town with harbour, a four-funnelled battleship is in harbour (168); similar views concentrating on the harbour and quayside (201ft).

Note: German intertitles.

*Context*

Joseph Rosenthal's Rosie Film Company made the film *Gibraltar* in 1911. Rosenthal, one of Britain's pioneer film cameramen, established his reputation working for Warwick Trading Company and Charles Urban Trading Company at the cusp of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Stephen Bottomore has stated that he was the 'first true professional' involved in filming warfare, becoming noted for his live action footage of the Boer War (Bottomore, 1983, 260). Rosenthal set up the Rosie Film Company in 1908. Here he initially concerned himself with directing slapstick comedy films, but a lack of success led him to return to shooting documentary subjects (Bottomore, 'Joseph Rosenthal'). *Gibraltar* was one of a number of short features filmed by Rosenthal on a 'tour into the wilds' and it was believed that this was the 'first time in the world's history' that the territory had been filmed (*BR*, 20 April 11, 95; *BR*, 6 April 1911, 16). The film received full-page advertising in the British cinematic press (*BR*, 6 April 1911, 16) and the German intertitles of the copy held in the BFI indicate that it also found an audience in at least some parts of mainland Europe.

Gibraltar, located at the western entrance to the Mediterranean, was captured by the British in 1704 during the War of Spanish Succession. Although nominally claimed on behalf of the pretender to the crown, Archduke Charles, the British soon began to monopolise control of the territory. This takeover was ratified in 1713 under the Treaties of Utrecht, whereby Spain ceded Britain 'the full and entire propriety of the town and castle of Gibraltar, together with the port, fortifications, and forts thereunto belonging [...] for ever, without any exception or impediment whatsoever' ('The Treaties of Utrecht (1713)'). There nevertheless followed concerted military attempts by the Spanish to retake Gibraltar, notably the Great Siege of 1779-1783. Spain still asserts a claim to the territory, although the majority of the population has expressed a desire to remain under sole British rule (see Oliver, Bolton, Dennis and Tempest).

In the years leading up to the First World War Gibraltar witnessed its greatest period of military expansion. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 increased the strategic importance of the territory, now situated on the trade route between Britain and India. The construction of new dockyards began in 1894, and a 1906 reorganisation of the British Navy led to a fleet of eight battleships being stationed there (Jackson, 1987, 206). The ambitions of the German government to establish an empire in Africa prompted the British and French to enter into the *Entente Cordiale* of 1903, which aimed to reaffirm power in the two countries' Mediterranean colonies. On 16 May 1907, Britain, France and Spain agreed to maintain the status quo in the Straits of Gibraltar; nevertheless, misunderstandings between the British and the Spanish continued. Most notable was a dispute over a border fence erected by the British around the rock in 1908 (Jackson, 1987, 261). However, among the local population, according to Jackson, a 'pride in being British as well as Gibraltarian was already becoming evident'; as evidence he cites the fact that the people of Gibraltar were among the most loyal supporters of the British during the Boer War (Jackson, 1987, 261).

During the British takeover of Gibraltar the majority of the original Spanish population left the territory. In addition, the Treaties of Utrecht specified that 'no leave shall be given under any pretence whatsoever, either to Jews or Moors, to reside or have their dwellings in the said town of Gibraltar' ('The Treaties of Utrecht (1713)'). Nevertheless, the town was soon inhabited by a variety of immigrants, among them British, Italians, Portuguese, Moroccans and Jews, as well as later Spanish arrivals. The Governor of Gibraltar at the time in which this film was made, General Sir Archibald Hunter, was out of step with the needs of this local community. He maintained that while he was governor, Gibraltar would be administered 'as a fortress and not as a commercial bazaar' (Jackson, 1987, 264). Although poverty and overcrowding existed on the island, modern municipal services had led to improved healthcare. Hunter, however, was not impressed with what he saw. He made it clear that he did not like the local population and that he considered their city to be dirty and untidy. Such attitudes led to him being recalled from his position in 1913 (Jackson, 1987, 264).

### **Analysis**

The sub-title of this film is 'Britain's £50,000,000 Fortress' and it is this military fortification of the territory that provides one of its main subjects. The film is structured to give the impression that it provides a full survey of Gibraltar. It begins with a study of the town shot from across the harbour waters. A panning movement from right to left reveals the entire spread of the town and the harbour before it. The film closes with what could be considered to be reverse shots of this opening

study. From a vantage point on the rock Rosenthal films the view across the town and out towards the harbour. Here a series of fairly static shots replace the earlier panning movement. They reveal military ships in the harbour, the arsenal, out-forts and bastions (*BR*, 20 April 1911, 95). Sandwiched in between is the detail of town life: Rosenthal films street scenes, a view of the market, and a closer study of the harbour. The latter scene is shot in amongst the boats in the choppy waters. Here a 180° panning movement aims to cover as much of the waterfront activity as possible.

Although it is the scenes shot from distant vantage points that provide the most obvious studies of the ‘fortress’ of Gibraltar, it is the street scenes that deliver a more interesting account of military intrusion into everyday life. A German intertitle merely stating ‘STRASSENSCENEN’ hints that the following segment will attempt a dispassionate view of urban activity. This is backed up by the way in which the following scenes are filmed: the camera is placed in fairly static positions; it frames as much of each street as possible and passers-by are allowed to enter and depart from the frame. Nevertheless, in two of three street scenes military activity can be witnessed. In the first scene two soldiers pass in the road and salute each other. In the third, possibly anticipated scene, a military band parades down the street, followed by marching troops.

The static camera captures the regular hustle and bustle that surrounds this military presence. The streets are teeming with people. The camera reveals the diverse and interacting demographic mix of Gibraltar, providing a contrast with the predominantly British-looking soldiers who constitute the troops. It also captures the relative poverty in which many of the people appear to have lived. Men and boys are dominant in the street scenes, and most are dressed in the flat-capped apparel of the Edwardian working class. Several of the people show an interest in the camera. Here, as is often in early film, it is not serving as an invisible eye. When the people in the street pause before it the camera does not move away; the viewer can register their interest in the camera’s interest.

The cameraman employs a different tactic for scenes shot in the market. This time there is use of panning movements. These serve two purposes. First, there is an establishing shot, in which the camera works its way from right to left disclosing the various stalls in the market. Second, there is a study of the market workers themselves. Similar to the manner in which the previous panning movement encompassed the array of stalls, here a corresponding motion from right to left captures the different types of market traders. This is an arranged scene, with the workers grouped together and the majority of them looking towards the camera. Here the actuality has moved furthest away from its study of military Gibraltar and is instead deliberately outlining the types of people who live

on the rock. Moreover, in setting up a contrast between its distant outlines of 'fortress' Gibraltar and the animated scenes shot among the town's streets, Rosenthal provides evidence that the pulse of Gibraltar was to be found among its bazaars and not in its fortifications.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

#### **Works cited**

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- Bottomore, Stephen, 'The Most Glorious Profession', *Sight and Sound*, 52/4 (Autumn 1983), 260-65.
- 'The First of Rosie's New Series', *Bioscope Review*, 11/236 (20 April 1911), 95.
- 'High-class Travel and Educational Pictures Never Before Cinematographed', *Bioscope Review*, 11/234 (6 April 1911), 16.
- Jackson, Sir William G. F., *The Rock of the Gibraltarians: A History of Gibraltar* (Grendon: Gibraltar Books, 1987).
- Oliver, Mark, Sally Bolton, Jon Dennis and Matthew Tempest, 'Gibraltar', *Guardian* 4 August 2004), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/aug/04/qanda.foreignpolicy>.
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**GLIMPSES OF INDIA**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1307>  
 Series Title: NATURE STUDIES  
 Title Ref:  
 Director: GORDON, Leslie Howard and others  
 Prod. Country: GB  
 Year: 1929  
 Title Status: F  
 Production Company: Visual Education  
 Release Date: 1929  
 Format: 35  
 Run Time (Mins): 15  
 Length: 1894 Feet 577 Metres  
 Colour Code: B  
 Sound System: SLNT  
 Credits:  
 Director: GORDON, Leslie Howard  
 Director: RADLEY, Christopher A.  
 Production Company: Visual Education  
 Producer: GORDON, Leslie Howard  
 Producer: RADLEY, Christopher A.

*Synopsis*

INTEREST - Travelogue. Scenes of Indian life and architecture.

RL.1 Seas breaking on the rocks at Cape Comorin (58-89); the Afghan end of the Khyber Pass (106-182); sentries on guard (233); a camel caravan (332); map of Europe superimposed on map of Indian continent to show relative sizes (353); the Golden Temple, Amritsar (380-408); Taj Mahal, Agra (418-449); the Maharajah's palace, Mysore (451-475); diagram showing relative populations of Great Britain, North America, Africa and India (552); pilgrims at the Bathing Festival, Benares (558-588); irrigating fields with water wheels (608-662); drawing water from a well (665-715); the Great Dam on the River Kauriala (725-763); cutting rice (775-795); oxen ploughing and raji being sown

(808-842); reaping the cholam harvests (850-939).

RL.2 Village life in Southern India showing bullocks being washed (30); a bullock fair at Subramaniya (126); a street scene (131-181); a native dance by Lambadi women (188-233); fishermen at work (249-307); market scenes (317-349); dhobies (358-429); a potter (434-558); a barber (606-660); a chatti market (588); a water carrier (592-602); snake-charmers (663-714); gathering manure for fuel (723-748); a dance by Onaons of Bihar (774-854); river fishing (959). The End (1894ft).

### *Context*

*Glimpses of India* (1929) formed part of the 'Nature Studies' series, which was produced by Visual Education Ltd, a now obscure, but then prolific, British company. The co-directors, both of whom had been involved with the British film industry since the teens, made other episodes in the series which do not have a colonial setting. The films were made with a school audience in mind. In its Educational Films section the *Monthly Film Bulletin* stated that, although a 'rather scrappy film', *Glimpses of India* would be 'Suitable for children of 10 to 15' (*MFB*, September 1934, 62).

The late 1920s was a period of political change in India. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 had planned for the gradual introduction of self-governing institutions in the country. Indian nationalists, however, argued that the proposals did not go far enough. In 1920 the Indian National Congress (INC) voted in support of Gandhi's proposal for self-rule, and for a period adopted a policy of non-co-operation with the British authorities. The late 1920s witnessed the Simon Commission's review of the 1919 Reforms. The all-white composition of the Commission prompted further protests from Indian nationalists, which in turn led to the 1929 declaration by the Indian Viceroy, Lord Irwin, that 'the natural issue of India's constitutional progress [...] is the attainment of Dominion status', i.e. parity with the self-governing, white nations of the British Empire. Once again, however, the British response did not satisfy Indian nationalists' demands. The Irwin Declaration led to another period of non-co-operation by the INC amid calls for a fully independent India.

This was also a period of social change. The population of India grew from just over 305,700,000 in 1921 to 388,171,000 a decade later (Brown, 1994, 253). Although the number of town dwellers increased by less than one per cent in this decade – from 10.2 per cent to 11.1 per cent of the population – the fact that the population was growing as a whole meant that this was a time of

increasing urbanisation (Brown, 1994, 253). This period also witnessed an expansion in transport infrastructure, in media communication, and in education at all levels. Each of these aspects helped to encourage a greater sense of Indian identity, which in turn bolstered the nationalist cause (Brown, 1994, 25).

Despite these transformations life for the majority of Indians remained relatively unchanged. During the first half of the twentieth century the proportion of the population employed in agriculture remained steady, at around 70 per cent (Brown, 1994, 254). Moreover, Judith Brown has argued that:

...despite the economic upheavals of the war and its aftermath, despite the British bid for a new political order and Gandhi's visionary enterprise, much remained the same in the content of the subcontinent's interlocking political worlds, just as remarkably little changed in ordinary Indians' daily experience of work, family, and leisure. No striking or simple process of 'westernization' occurred as communications drew the subcontinent nearer to Europe, and as more Indians passed between the two (Brown, 1994, 249).

### **Analysis**

*Glimpses of India* provides a geographical study of the sub-continent. The film's credentials are laid out in an early credit, which states that the footage has been 'Approved by Professor L. W. Lyde, M.A., Emeritus Professor of Geography, London University'. Its remit is indicated by the first title card, which states that 'India is a great country – great in size, history and buildings – great in her peoples and their religions – great in the wonderful possibilities of her future'.

The span of India laid out in the opening scenes, which begin by showing India's southernmost point at Cape Comorin and then head 1,900 miles north to the Khyber Pass. The film provides facts and figures. Basic, but effective, graphics illustrate the size of the country by superimposing a map of India onto a map of Europe. Population numbers are represented by means of a pair of scales, which balance the figures for India against the combined population totals of Africa and the Americas (minus Peru, which is added to the Indian side). The film does not dwell upon the buildings and religions of India. These subjects are combined swiftly in successive scenes, which depict the Golden Temple at Amritsar, the Taj Mahal, and the Maharajah's Palace at Mysore. The 'wonderful possibilities of her future' are not fully outlined either. Unsurprisingly, the film does not



refer to the political climate in India; nor does it address the advances in transport, urbanisation, education and media (of which it forms a part). Instead the film focuses on agriculture. We are shown various methods that have been employed to overcome the ‘serious difficulty of irrigation’, there is an outlining of various types of wheat, and there is an unresolved scene which ponders ‘Two of India’s conflicting problems – fuel and manure’.

Rather than addressing the future, *Glimpses of India* looks back to the past. Midway through the film we witness the ‘scene in a lane’, which claims to show ‘India of a thousand years ago’. What actually follows is documentary footage of Indians in a roadway, some of whom are carrying pots upon their heads. Three British men wearing western clothing walk into view, but no mention is made of them. The latter half of the film is concerned solely with the ancient nature of the sub-continent. This section is prefigured with a title card that reads ‘THE UNCHANGING EAST. Some characteristic scenes of Indian life’. *Glimpses of India* then turns to rural India to gather its evidence. There is an emphasis on folk culture, including the dances of Lambadi women – ‘the gypsies of India’ – and of the Oraons of Bihar – ‘simple folk, often animists in religion, living on the land’. We are shown an array of ancient practices whose backward nature is emphasised by exclamation marks in the title cards: ‘The dhobies still wash clothes by beating them on stones!’, ‘The barber’s is an open air occupation!’. Elsewhere these cards stress that the potter plies his ‘ancient’ trade and that the water carrier is ‘old’. Unsurprisingly, all of the camerawork takes place outdoors. This nevertheless furthers the portrayal of the basic nature of Indian life. At the same time the camera’s intrusion into these people’s lives is apparent. As it lingers over teeming crowds – another feature of the film – the people stare back at it, registering its presence.

Despite its display of academic credentials and its use of devices that intimate it will incorporate the full span of the country, the film’s glimpses of India take the place of a more diverse representation of the sub-continent.

**Richard Osborne (June 2009)**

*Works cited*

Brown, Judith, M., *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: OUP, 1994).  
*Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1/8 (September 1934), 62.

FILM TITLE:

**the HANDYMEN**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5751>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1941

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

India

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Film Advisory Board of India

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Indian Film Unit

National Studios

SHORT SUMMARY:

The work and training of the (Royal Bombay) Sappers and Miners; film stresses the military importance of their work as the "lifeline of the army" and the value to the men of their acquired skills once the war is over.

FULL SUMMARY:

Film is introduced by shots of the advance on Tobruk: Indian Sappers and Miners are then shown doing PT to music; river crossing (in portable assault boats, then building a ferry with collapsible pontoons); washing and eating; a school for troops' children; the men themselves receive instruction (eg pneumatic drill, sign painting, welding, brick making and laying, carpentry, printing, surveying and all sorts of metal-working); road building (with new machinery); digging a railway cutting; practice in "digging in" slit-trench system, sandbag shelters, and dugouts; and bridging a river bed with a girder bridge.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Patel, Gordonbhai: cameraman

Bodhye, Jinaraja: cameraman

Parmar, Pratap: film editor

Talyarkhan, A F S: commentary

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

LPU

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/N

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

787 ft

RUNNING TIME:

8 mins

BLACK &amp; WHITE / COLOUR:

B&amp;W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTTILES:

None

### Context

In July 1940, the Film Advisory Board (FAB) was constituted to oversee the production of propaganda films in India. Organised by the Government of India, the FAB was comprised primarily of leading figures of the Indian film industry. The production of films was partly funded by the British government's Ministry of Information (MoI), who therefore had a say in the appointment of staff (Woods, 2001, 297). Disappointed with the quality of early FAB films, the MoI suggested that a British documentary film expert should supervise production (Garga, 2007, 66-67). Alex Shaw, a filmmaker of some standing, was duly selected and arrived in India in late 1940.

Although Shaw succeeded in improving the quality of the FAB's films, he resigned after only 10 months at his post, claiming that this was 'partly on personal grounds, partly because he was not accepted by the Indian industry' (Garga, 2007, 80). The appointment of a British expert had been widely criticised in the Indian movie press, and Shaw further believed that the Indian members of the FAB had wanted his efforts to fail (Garga, 2007, 69-70; Woods, 2001, 301). During his period in charge, Shaw included more Indian personnel in the making of films, as reflected by *The Handymen*, which uses an Indian editor and cameramen, and employs an Indian narrator for its English-language version (Woods, 2001, 294). His term in India coincided with a period of widespread civil disobedience, during which Indian nationalists were refusing to co-operate with the government.

Shaw wanted to make films that addressed the political situation, but was refused permission by the Government of India (Woods, 2001, 301). He later was of the opinion that, because the FAB was 'set up by the British to help create a favourable climate of opinion at a time when the Indian mind was entirely set on independence', it was 'not only frivolous but also irrelevant' (Garga, 2007, 68).

Of the 13 original documentary films that Shaw produced for the FAB a high proportion concern military matters. *The Handymen* focuses on the work of the Bombay Sappers and Miners, a regiment of the Corps of Engineers in the Indian Army. Tracing their origins back to the late eighteenth century, the Bombay Sappers and Miners served the British in numerous military operations both in India and abroad. In World War II they saw action in Malaya, Singapore, Burma, Abyssinia, Eritrea, North Africa, Syria, Italy and Greece.

*The Handymen* serves varied propaganda purposes. On the one hand, it encourages further military recruitment. On the other hand, it argues for the benefits of British rule in India. Here the propaganda is not only aimed at Indian audiences. Whereas the Government of India was chiefly concerned with the reception of the FAB's films in India itself, the MoI was interested in the audience beyond the sub-continent (Woods, 2001, 298-99). Britain was anxious to ensure US support for the War, and consequently the FAB's films are sensitive to American opinion about Imperial rule. R.R. Ford, of the British Library of Information in New York, had warned that 'The fundamental problem is the unfortunate fact that very little, if anything, that a British person says about Indian affairs is believed here' (Garga, 2007, 77). He therefore encouraged the production of films in which 'Indians should be shown as often as possible in self-responsible duties, with British officers kept out of the picture' (Ford, 15 October 1941).

Ford regarded *The Handymen* and another Shaw film, *Defenders of India*, as representing a 'great advance' upon early FAB films. Although neither film was deemed suitable for cinematic release in America, he endorsed their nationwide non-theatrical distribution (Ford, 15 October 1941). Similarly, the MoI thought that the Shaw-era films were of an improved standard, and in Britain, as well as the 'Empire territories and neutral countries', *The Handymen* received non-theatrical release (Leach, 22 March 1943). The MoI estimated that 1700,000 people had witnessed the film via its cinema units by March 1943 (Leach, 22 March 1943). Like other FAB films, *The Handymen* was dubbed into several languages and was circulated as widely in India as possible. It was distributed to

the 200 English-language cinemas; the 1,000 Indian-language cinemas; and, via mobile cinema vans, to the vast rural population who provided the main source of military recruits (Woods, 2001, 299).

### **Analysis**

Reflecting its varied audiences, *The Handymen* serves several, overlapping purposes. It wishes to convey the contribution of Indian servicemen to the War cause; it wishes to encourage more Indian recruits; and it wishes to convey the progressive nature of British imperial rule to an American audience.

The film opens with borrowed footage of the advance on Tobruk. This serves two needs. On the one hand, it stresses the Indian contribution to an advance by an 'army of the British Empire'. On the other hand, it introduces the particular contribution of the Sappers and Miners. We learn of 'an enemy almost worse than the Italians', and are informed that this is 'the sand'. The role of the Sappers and Miners – the army's 'handymen' – is to use their engineering skills to get the forces past such physical barriers.

The Sappers and Miners are then cleverly introduced on screen. While the commentary argues that it is their work that lies 'behind the story of the smash-up of Mussolini's African Empire', we witness them performing synchronised exercises at a training camp in India. This emphasises both their non-combative role, and their readiness for the job ahead. This sequence shows Indians conducting the training. British influence is also in evidence, however: the soldiers are shown exercising to an orchestra that plays western classic music on western instrumentation.

This sequence also sets the tone stylistically. It features shots of the men operating together as a team, interspersed with individual portraits of the soldiers – a pattern that will be repeated throughout the rest of the film. It also introduces us two soldiers who are named and who periodically feature in the following segments. As such, the subsequent action is personalised.

Shaw argued for a more subtle form of propaganda than the FAB's films had hitherto displayed. To this end, the film aims to entice recruits, not by stressing the danger of the enemy, but instead by illustrating the benefits of army life. It combines footage of the skills that the men employ in the field (boat building, bridge and road construction), with the pleasures that their training camp has to offer (food, recreation, education). Its main emphasis, however, is on the trades that they are being

taught for 'when they return to civil life' (engineering, construction, train driving). Here, British-backed instruction is portrayed in the most positive light.

*The Handymen* appears to be more progressive in its portrayal of Indian military personnel than the contemporary FAB film *Defenders of India*. In *The Handymen*, unlike *Defenders of India*, there is no footage showing the British officers in command; instead Indian soldiers are depicted operating in a self-contained unit. Moreover, there is less use of the divisive word 'they' to describe the Indian soldiers on screen; instead the language is more inclusive: 'we're going to show you'. Nevertheless, it must be considered to what extent this editorial policy was determined by American, rather than Indian taste. To best relay British achievements in the sub-continent R.R. Ford had requested films that show the 'improved social services instituted by the British and with Indians responsible for operational control' (Garga, 2007, 77-78). *The Handymen* duly complies.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

#### **Works cited**

Ford, R.R. (Film Officer, British Library of Information, NY), letter to J. Hennessey (Principal Information Officer, Bureau of Public Information, Home Department, Government of India), 15 October 1941 [document in India Office materials held at the British Library. File: L/I/1/691 'Films from India'].

Garga, B.D., *From Raj to Swaraj: The Non-fiction Film in India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2007).

Leach, F. Burton (India Section, Empire Division, MoI), letter to J.F. Gennings (India Office, Whitehall), 22 March 1943 [document in India Office materials held at the British Library. File: L/I/1/692 'Films – India'].

Woods, Philip, 'From Shaw to Shantaram', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21/3 (August 2001), 293-308.

FILM TITLE:

**HE'S IN THE NAVY**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2514>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1940 (ca)

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

India

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Wadia Movietone

SHORT SUMMARY:

Film showing what happens when a boy joins the Royal Indian Navy.

FULL SUMMARY:

Footage of India's coastline is used as an introduction. Indian boys arriving to join the Navy are shown next, and the film chooses one of them to follow. It shows the medical, enrolment, swearing in and the receiving of new clothes and kitbags. Badges of rank are indicated, and there is an explanation of what the various stripes mean. Film is shown of the boys marching, just after they have joined and after three months, with verbal commentary noting the difference. The troops are shown at training school, with film of them in the canteen, at the gunnery school, undergoing medical training, learning the use of semaphore, and relaxation activities. After training school they are shown on board ship having their first boat drill. Out at sea the sailor whom the film has chosen to follow is shown taking a turn at the wheel. Training continues at sea, and the film concludes by showing a simulated enemy raid.

NOTES:

Production: made with the cooperation of Vice-Admiral Herbert Fitzherbert CB CMS, Flag Officer Commanding, and the men of the Royal Indian Navy

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Radcliffe Genge, G: director

Pathy, P V (Dr): photography

Subrahmaniam, P: photography

Shankar, C M (BSc): assistant cameraman

Tata, Burjore M: sound recordist

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

UPU

## FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/N

## NUMBER OF REELS:

1

## LENGTH:

1147 ft

## RUNNING TIME:

12 mins

## BLACK &amp; WHITE / COLOUR:

B&amp;W

## SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

## LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

## LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

## LANGUAGE OF SUBTTLES:

None

*Context*

*He's in the Navy* was one of the first two World War II documentaries to be made in India, the other being *A Day in the Life of a Sepoy* (1940). These projects were initiated by Desmond Young, who worked as chief press officer and as a member of the war propaganda team in the Government of India (Garga, 2007, 60). Young was operating in response to a Ministry of Information request to produce films for 'war propaganda' within India and also to 'project a modern and progressive India under British rule to audiences abroad, particularly the United States' (Garga, 2007, 62).

*He's in the Navy* was produced by the Indian filmmaker J. B. H. Wadia, one the pioneers of the documentary film movement in the sub-continent. His companies had been jointly responsible for the first Indian newsreel, *The Indian Gazette* and they had produced *Haripura Congress* (1938), India's first feature-length documentary (Wadia Movietone Archive, 2003). Wadia was a founding member of M. N. Roy's Radical Democratic Party, which espoused the causes of independence, women's emancipation, Hindu-Muslim communal harmony, dignity of labour and eradication of the caste system (Wadia Movietone Archive, 2003).



At the outbreak of World War II the major Indian political party, the Indian National Congress (INC), had resigned from local government, refusing to support the Allied cause. Wadia, in contradistinction, produced films that promoted Britain's war aims. These included *He's in the Navy* and *Planes of Hindustan*. According to S. Mulugundam he justified this work on the grounds that supporting democracy in the face of Nazi aggression 'would definitely lead to independence for India too' (Mulugundam, 2002, 70).

In May 1940 Desmond Young flew to London to show some of these early films to the Ministry of Information. They found them interesting but not good enough for exhibition abroad. Back in India, Young had the films dubbed into various Indian languages, but found that his main problem here lay in gaining distribution (Young, 29 October 1940, 1). To that end in July 1940 India's first official film body, the Film Advisory Board (FAB), was constituted. Its first chairman was J. B. H. Wadia, and *He's in the Navy* formed part of the FAB's first catalogue of films. The aim of the FAB was to give the Indian public 'films of interesting war subjects and others of informatory value', and it resolved 'to make every effort to see that all cinemas exhibit these films' (quoted in Garga, 2007, 65). In order to help that effort most of the films were distributed for free (Young, 29 October 1940, 2).

Because their films were aimed at a largely illiterate audience, Wadia and Young were of the opinion they should be easy to understand. Wadia argued that they should be told in a 'straight-from-the-shoulder manner', adding that 'If a democratic form of government, despite its imperfections, is more desirable than a totalitarian one, they [the Indian audience] must be reminded of this all-important fact over and over again' (Garga, 2007, 72). In his autobiography Young stated that 'if recruiting were to be extended beyond the so-called "martial classes" life in the services would need to be portrayed in simple terms' (Garga, 2007, 63).

The recruitment drive was successful. Between 1939 and 1945 the Royal Indian Navy grew in size from 1700 officers and ratings to 30,000 (Jackson, 2006, 369). The RIN's main role was to 'recruit, train and administer' as well as being given patrol, escort and minesweeping duties in the coastal waters around India (Jackson, 2006, 369). Although Japanese forces constituted the main threat, they did not wage a significant maritime campaign against India during World War II (Jackson, 2006, 368-69).

### *Analysis*

The motto of Wadia Movietone was 'enlightenment through entertainment'. *He's in the Navy* is illustrative of the fact that in a war propaganda documentary this can be a difficult ambition to realise.

In the first instance the viewers of *He's in the Navy* would not have received full enlightenment. The main objective of the documentary is obvious: the activities of young naval recruits are depicted in order to encourage more Indians to sign up for the war campaign. Nevertheless, the war itself barely impinges on the film. It is not mentioned directly, and instead there is talk of 'high adventures out at sea'. And the nearest sighting that we get of the 'enemy' is the dummy soldiers that are used for bayonet practice. Although this reflects the relative lack of engagement that the Indian navy encountered during World War II, the method could be argued to be somewhat duplicitous.

Rather than addressing the seriousness of war, the film instead adopts a light-hearted tone. This comedic emphasis of *He's in the Navy* serves distinct purposes. On the one hand the film aims to enlist new recruits by depicting the navy as fun. On the other hand, and perhaps undercutting this recruitment drive, the film delivers its entertainment quota by using the naval recruits as the butt of its jokes. This is done partly through the choice of material. Although the film depicts the recruits developing from a disorganised rabble into an efficient fighting unit, it never allows them their full dignity. Instead, their training is played for laughs. We get to witness their first clumsy attempts at drill; we are meant to laugh at them as they eat voraciously in the canteen; and we watch them belly-flop into a swimming pool.

Underpinning the humour of these situations is the commentary. The narrative in the English-language version of *He's in the Navy* is written and supplied by the film's director, G. Radcliffe Genge. He regularly adopts a mocking tone. When witnessing the recruits let loose with bayonets he exclaims 'Great guns!' with pretended alarm. He dismisses their sporting recreation as a willingness to 'sock each other on the jaw' or to 'bang shuttlecocks'. He is at his most mirthful during the training on board HMS Dalhousie, 'where first we learn swinging the lead, and I don't mean it your way either'. Here he yells 'Man overboard!' and 'Man the boats!'. These dramatic cries set up a comic denouement in which the recruits save a life buoy rather than a human being. Srirupa Roy has argued that 'the particular filmic form favoured by FAB officials was one that underscored a vertical or hierarchical relation of authority between film-maker and film-viewer, and by implication, between state and society' (Roy, 2002, 240). What is perhaps most troubling about the English-

language version of *He's in the Navy* is that it features a mature British narrator (representing the film-maker) laughing at Indian boys (with whom the original film-viewer was supposed to identify).

Elsewhere the film demonstrates the dominance and self-assurance of British rule. The instruction received at the naval base is depicted as superior to that found in the daily life of the sub-continent. More subtly, in a scene that shows the swearing-in of the naval recruits it can be seen that the largest book to hand is a bible. The film endorses, and is endorsed by, authority. An early title card proudly informs us that the documentary was 'made with the co-operation of Vice-Admiral Herbert Fitzherbert'. The Vice-Admiral also makes an appearance in the film, concluding a sequence that offers the most blatant display of hierarchical power. In ascending order the naval recruits are shown the various badges of rank, as well as those who wear them. Each of the senior officers that we see is British.

J.B.H. Wadia's documentaries received greater acknowledgement from British authorities than they did from Indian Nationalists. In 1942 the British government awarded him the MBE. However, despite his long commitment to the film industry, Wadia received no formal honours from the Indian government.

#### **Richard Osborne (September 2009)**

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**HILLMEN GO TO WAR**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/54>  
 Title Ref: Sift 22552  
 Director: VILLIERS, Kenneth  
 Prod. Country: IN  
 Year: 1944  
 1st Release: 1944  
 Prodn. Company: Films Division, Government of India  
 Release Country:  
 Format: 35  
 Run Time (Mins): 9  
 Length:  
 Colour Code: B  
 Colour System:  
 Sound System: SOUN  
 Language: ENG  
 Dubbed: N  
 Subtitled: N

*Credits*

Director VILLIERS, Kenneth  
 Production Company Films Division, Government of India  
 Additional credits  
 Produced by MIR, Ezra  
 Photography BODHYE, Jinraj  
 Editing DESAI, Sadanand  
 Musical Score KAUFMAN, Walter

*Synopsis*

The way in which Indian hill tribes make contributions to the war effort.

An annual religious festival accompanied by music and dancing is something the hillmen look forward to with pleasure (182). The years between the celebrations of this festival are busier than usual as the people join in the struggle for peace. Goats assume added importance to their owners as whole families earn their living by producing wool and weaving blankets for the fighting men

(268). The wartime demand for timber has meant extensive tree felling. Tree trunks are lowered into the valleys, down chutes into the rivers and floated to the plains towns. At the end of the season, even the chutes are dismantled and sent downstream (375). Gas-producing plants need a steady supply of charcoal. The hillmen pile up logs, cover them with packed earth and burn them slowly to turn them to charcoal (453). Resin gatherers, once casual workers, are now fully employed collecting resin for turpentine and rosin production (523). Silk-worm cultivation and the production of silk thread is another industry that has been expanded by wartime demand (580). Crushed and ground chestnuts yield good quantities of starch. The chestnut residue is used as a basis for bread (655). Tea picking has become so necessary that there are not enough workers to meet the demand. Picking, weighing, drying and packing tea are all processes requiring a large number of people (746). Even potato production is an economic proposition (772). All these essential goods are carried down the mountains by the hillmen themselves (791). In the towns, they can enlist in the army (825) and go to training camps to prepare for war (871). (889 ft).

### *Context*

In 1943 the Film Advisory Board, the body that had been created to oversee the production of wartime documentaries in India, was dissolved and Information Films of India (IFI) was created in its stead. Under this new organisation the Government of India assumed full responsibility for propaganda films. In addition, the government implemented the Defence of India Rule 44A, effective from September 1943, which required that every cinema in India show at least 2000 feet of government 'approved' film at each performance. To ensure that the IFI's films reached as wide an audience as possible they were issued in separate English, Hindustani, Bengali, Tamil and Telugu versions ('Note for Cut Motion'). This closer governmental control of film production was the response to two main threats: the unrest in the sub-continent caused by the nationalist Quit India movement, and the growing seriousness of the war in South-East Asia (Garga, 2007, 97). *Hillmen Go to War* was made in 1944, the year in which Japanese forces came closest to invading India, fighting battles at Imphal and Kohima.

The Second World War deployed a large amount of Indian resources and manpower. By 1943, India was third only to Britain and Canada in producing goods for war supply (Jackson, 2006, 358). The number of soldiers serving in the Indian Army grew from 205,058 men in October 1939 to 2,251,050 in July 1945, the majority of whom came from rural areas (Brown, 1994, 319; Garga, 2007, 109). The war effort had its effect on the Indian economy, bringing with it inflation and food shortages (Brown, 1994, 325). Of all the Empire countries India provided the most serious

opposition to Britain's war effort. The outbreak of war witnessed the leading Indian political party, the Indian National Congress, resign from government rather than support the war cause, and in 1942 the party launched the 'Quit India' movement, demanding full independence for India.

The 'hillmen' featured in this film come from the state of Himachal Pradesh in north-west India. This area is home to a number of different territories and tribes, including the Koilis, Halis, Dagis, Dhaugris, Dasa, Khasas, Kinnars and Kirats. During the late eighteenth century much of the state came under the control of Gurkhas, and it was only following the Anglo-Nepalese war (1814-16) that the area came under British stewardship. This film focuses on the contributions of Himachal Pradesh to the war cause. During the period of British rule the chiefs of the hill states were largely loyal to the colonial government (Ahluwalia, 1998, 31). Nevertheless, the area was not immune to the political awakening in the sub-continent. From the late 1930s onwards the local protest organisation Praja Mandal campaigned on two main objectives: a weakening of the autocratic rule of the hill chiefs and independence for India. During the war this movement urged the local people not to recruit to the army or to give money towards war funds (Ahluwalia, 1998, 32).

*Hillmen Go to War* was produced by the head of the IFI, the Indian director Ezra Mir. During the war Mir increasingly steered the IFI documentary output away from military propaganda towards films that reflected the socio-economic and cultural life of Indian people (Garga, 2007, 108-09). It was directed by Kenneth Villiers, who had found fame as an actor in the 1936 film *Things to Come*, but who was directing documentaries in India as part of his war service duties (Davis). The composer of the film's score, Walter Kaufman, although born in Bohemia, was a noted scholar of Hindu music and was the composer of the signature tune for All India Radio (Cook and Cook).

### *Analysis*

*Hillmen Go To War* is a somewhat transitory film among the IFI's output: while pursuing war propaganda it also provides a study of the hill people in Himachal Pradesh.

The war effort is the principal subject of the film and as such it overshadows any effort that is made to provide a rounded account of the people. There is no information regarding which of the area's tribes is being featured and there is little mention of the regions that are on display. As expected, the protest movements within the area are ignored. Instead the film focuses on the increased agricultural output of the area.

What is interesting about this film is the manner in which it subverts one of the standard representations of the sub-continent in colonial documentaries. The film begins with a familiar trope: India is represented by means of village life; existence is shown to be harmonious, custom-driven and unchanging. There are images of religious dancing and the worship of idols: 'it happened like this every year', the commentary states. Several other documentaries highlight what they view as the circularity of Indian life by opening and closing with the same scenes. This is a linear film however and one whose subject matter is change: 'the hillmen's year has been filled with new work, new interests, new contacts with the world down below'. There are images of increased crop yields and new trades, and the film concludes with hillmen signing up for the army. This cause of this change is not labelled as British in origin, but instead comes under the abstract notion of 'war'. As the dialogue progresses it is this word that takes the place of an earlier stress on the 'peace' of the people's existence.

Although the film is concerned with progress it still retains a condescension towards 'primitive' India: charcoal manufacture is outlined as being a 'simple task' and resin gatherers are described as 'once casually tapping a tree here and there to have a tit-bit to sell at the market'. The film is unusual in that it considers the future effects of the expanded wartime economy: there is a stress on saving the increased income 'as an insurance against disaster'. However, even here the ancient ways of rural India are underlined: the commentary imagines the 'earthenware jar where they keep their savings'. Similarly, the pastoral score provided by Walter Kaufman harks back to the notion of India as a rural idyll.

The documentary is more progressive in the way in which it films the hill people. Several of the film's segments begin with panning shots, which sweep across the countryside to arrive at scenes of agricultural activity. Thus the location of the industry is effectively established. In filming the locals at work there is a determination to show exactly what is taking place, the skill that lies behind it, and also to provide portraits of the workers. In each instance a mixture of shots is used – there are medium long-shots disclosing the overall activity, shots of hands at work upon the substances and goods, and head-and-shoulders shots of the workers. The aptitude and dignity of the people are underlined in manner that is absent in the commentary. Nevertheless, there remains the fact that the people are filmed in this manner to help state the case that they will provide 'healthy, strong, fighting manpower' for war. In this respect, there is an extent to which the film's linear construction could be said to jeopardise its propaganda purposes. The documentary first concentrates on the wartime

supply of goods and food but concludes with the local supply of men: planting the thought that they too could be considered as fodder.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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'Note for Cut Motion on 15<sup>th</sup> March 1944: Defence of India Rule 44A' [document in India Office materials held at the British Library. File: L/I/1/686 'Films for Publicity'].



Titles

## HISTORIC MUTINY SITES

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/109>

Technical Data

\* Year: 1914

\* Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

\* Colour:

Black/White

\* Sound:

Silent

\* Footage:

341

Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

Great Britain

## Synopsis

INTEREST. Travelogue principally around Delhi. Main titles. (3) MS double gateway, in a perimeter wall, horse and ox traffic passing through. (8) CU of the head of one of the archways. (12) MCU train arriving at a station, a large crowd waiting on the platform to greet it. (15) MCU group of dignitaries, having arrived on the train, walking along the platform and past the camera, and followed by the crowd. (39) MCU military band and escort marching along the platform once the crowds have passed. (62) An archway over a major road, supported by scaffolding. (74) Tailors at work, sitting cross-legged in the open air. (82) "Arrival of Nizam of Hyderabad the Dhrangadhra Camp." **[which is in Gujarat]**(90) MS several men standing looking towards the camera as it pans over formal gardens. Marquees are visible in the background. (117) MS gardens with military guards standing to attention in the background. (130) MS horsedrawn carriage makes its way through the gardens towards and past the camera. (146) MS decorative archway with a canopy extending over a walkway beyond it. Various men can be seen walking up and down. (154) MCU crowds walking up and down a stone staircase in a town. (175) "Scenes about the Delhi fort. Statue where Gen. Nicholson fell." (182) MCU man plays a tambour with other musicians, people look on and dance to the music. The fort is visible in the background. (192) MCU fort walls. (198) MS people coming out of the entrance. The camera pans along the wall. (219) MS statue marked, "John Nicholson". (226)

"St. Jame's (sic) Church cross and ball riddled during siege of 1857". (233) MS facade of church, camera pans to the top of the church spire. (239) CU original ball and cross, pitted with holes, and set in a courtyard of the church buildings. (248) MS gateway with a plaque over it, pedestrians passing. (258) "Magazine Gateway. Where six soldiers destroyed powder and themselves to save capture. " (267) MS monument with a cross mounted on it. (272) "The Mutiny Monument. An old veteran." (278) CU inscription at the base of the monument, an Indian man posing for the camera beside it. (284)

### Context

Made in 1914, this film is primarily concerned with sites in Delhi that relate to the Indian Rebellion of 1857. At the time of the Rebellion, British control of India lay in the hands of the British East India Company. The rebellion began on 10 May 1857, when Indian sepoys, ordinary soldiers serving in the Bengal division of the British East India Company's Army, mutinied at a small military station in Meerut. It was only contained with the fall of Gwalior on 20 June 1858. In the same year power in India was transferred to the British Crown.

The sepoys had various grievances: new demands that they serve in far-flung territories; the introduction of gun cartridges that were greased with beef and pork fat and were therefore contaminating to both Hindus and Muslims; and problems relating to a loss of privileges and increased taxation in the recently annexed area of Oudh, home to over one third of the soldiers (Brown, 1994, 87-89). Vastly outnumbering British personnel, they quickly assumed control in parts of the upper Gangetic plain and central India (Hibbert, 1980, 19). They seized Delhi following the destruction of the station at Meerut. In the process many European residents were massacred, and the sepoys installed Bhadur Shar, the last Moghul, as their leader.

Unfortunately, there is no documentation about the makers of this travelogue (Dixon). Their concern, however, is with sites in Delhi that relate to British heroism. They film the Kashmiri Gate, where several British military personnel died as they blew up their magazine rather than letting it fall into sepoys' hands. They show the area where General John Nicholson fell and the statue erected in his memory. Nicholson, the most dynamic officer in the recapture of Delhi, was also among the most ruthless in his treatment of mutineers, his dictum being 'the punishment of mutiny is death' (Hibbert, 1989, 293). Also featured are St James Church and the ball and cross in its grounds, which the sepoys used for target practice ('1857 Mutiny Tour'). This church also houses John Nicholson's

grave. Finally, the film shows the Mutiny Monument, erected in 1863 to honour British victims of the uprising ('Mutiny Monument, Delhi').

Bryony Dixon argues that the tradition of depicting the mutiny sites 'began with the event itself', citing the documentary photographs of Felix Beato, which captured the aftermath of the rebellion (Dixon). According to Patrick Brantlinger, 'No episode in British imperial history raised public excitement to a higher pitch than the Indian Mutiny of 1857' (Brantlinger, 1988, 199). He argues that 'Most British writing about the Mutiny before 1914 is part of an imperialist heritage of division and mutual hate' (Brantlinger, 1988, 222). John Nicholson, in particular, emerged as a martyred hero for the British, being referenced in numerous literary works, including Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901).

The mutiny took on increasing symbolic importance for Indians. In 1909 Vinayak Damodar Savarkar published his significantly titled *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, which argued that the rebellion was in fact a nationalist revolution. His work reflected advances in Indian politics: the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885, and the Muslim League in 1906. The Great War (1914-18) ushered in the first stages of constitutional reform, with the Montagu Declaration of 1917 promising Dominion status for India.

Following the achievement of Indian independence in 1947, several of the sites featured in this film were reconfigured. John Nicholson's statue was removed and resituated at his old school in Dungannon, Ireland. Meanwhile, the Mutiny Monument was re-dedicated to the martyrs of India's freedom struggles ('Mutiny Monument, Delhi').

### **Analysis**

Made in the year in which the First World War broke out, the film *Historic Mutiny Sites* makes mobile and visible the locations of British heroism of an earlier military campaign. It would be wrong, however, to make direct claims about the message that the filmmakers intended to convey: their range of locations expands beyond the mutiny sites, and their footage of the sites is not only concerned with memorialising British resilience.

The film does fulfil the task of document several of the 'Historic Mutiny Sites', as outlined in its opening title card. The sites around Delhi are, by and large, effectively labelled, with intertitles that detail the location that is shown as well as the events that took place there, i.e. 'where Gen Nicholson Fell', 'cross and ball riddled during siege', 'where six soldiers destroyed powder and

themselves to save capture by enemy'. However, the intertitle detailing the Magazine Gateway erroneously appears before footage of the Mutiny Monument, and early scenes showing a war-damaged city wall and an archway are not identified. In addition there are some anomalous scenes, including untitled footage of Indian troops disembarking a train and, more peculiarly, a section titled the 'Arrival of Nizam of Hyderabad: The Dhrangadhra Camp'. Dhrangadhra is in West India and was not troubled by the Indian Rebellion. Moreover, the Nizam of Hyderabad was loyal to the British during the mutiny (Hibbert, 1980, 375). These scenes instead capture something of the opulent lifestyle of the Indian Princes: the Nizam's richly ornamented carriage can be seen among the grand marquees that make up the camp.

The camera operator employs a number of devices in filming the mutiny sites. The establishing shots of the Delhi Fort are used to capture the size of the building: there is a cut from a shot in which this building occupies as much of the frame as possible, to one that indicates the scale of the people within this massive edifice. St James Church, meanwhile, is attractively framed. It is first shot through the trees in the churchyard. Here, the white building provides a strong contrast with the darkness of the trees. Similarly, in scenes that are possibly shot within the Delhi Fort, good use is made of light and shade: shadow is used to contrast the left and right sides of the image. Most of the scenes are filmed from a number of angles. As well as using long shots to situate each site, medium shots and medium close-ups are employed to depict details, such as an inscription on a plaque or the damage from cannon and gunfire.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this film is that, as well as filming the sites, the camera operator looks at the human activity that takes place around them. There is footage of the Indian military personnel who stand on guard at General John Nicholson's statue, the Mutiny Monument, and St James church. It is apparent that it is only the sites with monuments to British victims that are guarded. Meanwhile, Delhi's fortifications have been reabsorbed into the daily life of the city. Some of the activity here is military. A static camera position is used within the fortifications, allowing a number of different people to enter the frame, among them a large number of Indian troops. A static camera is also employed at St James Church, and here Indian civilians casually enter the frame. Elsewhere, the film deliberately focuses on Indian civilians, and the mutiny sites then serve as backdrops. In the early, untitled scenes the camera operator is keen to show the traffic that passes by the mutiny sites, capturing the pedestrians and the horse-drawn carts. There is also footage of a group of Indians working on some cloth in the street. Outside the Delhi Fort there are shots of Indian musicians. These people appear to have been arranged for the camera, and many of them

look directly at it. What is perhaps most notable about this footage is that it precedes the establishing shots of the fort. Despite its title, this film appears to be as interested in the present life of India as it is in the historic sites of British heroism.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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BFA 711

FILM NUMBER

FILM TITLE:

**HONG KONG HANDOVER**

[BRITISH ARMY IN HONG KONG PRIOR TO THE HANDOVER TO CHINA] [Allocated Series]

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5646>

PRODUCTION DATE:

18/6/1997

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Headquarters Land Command

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Headquarters Land Command Mobile News Team

SHORT SUMMARY:

Advance preparations by British forces for the handover of Hong Kong; scenes at Prince of Wales Barracks, Stonecutter's Island, «HMS Plover» and «HMS Chatham».

FULL SUMMARY:

ARMY MOBILE NEWS TEAM SHOTLIST

(The following data has been copied, without amendment, from Army Mobile News Team computer discs.)

01-00-00-00 BARS

01-01-44-44 Front entrance to Prince of Wales Bks

01-02-58-58 HMS Chatham moored alongside POW Bks

01-03-43-43 GVs over city and port areas

01-04-35-35 GVs over Stonecutters Island

01-05-32-32 Shot of seaking pilot (846 Naval Air Sqn)

01-05-58-58 Visit to HMS Plover

01-08-28-28 Fast Pursuit Boats from HMS Plover

01-09-08-08 Fast pursuit boats go after civilian vessel

01-11-44-44 GVs of HMS Plover

01-15-07-07 GVs of Hong Kong from HMS Plover

01-15-33-33 Capt of HMS Plover on the ships bridge  
 01-16-52-52 2IC of HMS Plover going about his duties  
 01-18-24-24 HMS Chatham with POW Bks in background  
 01-18-48-48 GV of Exhibition Centre from sea  
 01-18-55-55 Crew of HMS Plover working on deck  
 01-21-40-40 IV - Lt Comd Gary Sutton, CO, HMS Plover  
 01-26-00-00 Ships crew pose for a photograph  
 01-30-06-06 IV - Neil Moore, Wpn Engr  
 01-32-11-11 IV - Steven McSevitt, Snr Communicator  
 01-34-37-37 HMS Chatham and POW Bks (evening shot)

#### REFERENCES:

shotsheet

#### PRODUCTION CREDITS:

McKenzie, Stuart (Sergeant): cameraman

#### FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

Beta SP

#### LENGTH:

30

#### BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

Colour

#### SILENT / SOUND:

Sound

#### LANGUAGE OF SUBTTLES:

English

#### *Context*

In 1841 the British Navy captured Hong Kong Island during the First Opium War with China (Melson, 1997, 4). The following year, Hong Kong Island was formally ceded to Britain under the Treaty of Nanking. In the latter half of the nineteenth century neighbouring areas were also gained by Britain, culminating with the 1898 Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory, under which the British secured a lease from the Qing Dynasty giving them full jurisdiction over the remaining land in the surrounding area. This 99-year lease was due to expire on 30 June 1997, a situation that led the governments of Britain and the People's Republic of China to produce the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984. With this declaration the British government agreed that,

when the lease expired, they would surrender sovereignty of the leased territories, as well as Hong Kong Island and Kowloon; in return, the Chinese government agreed to operate a 'one country, two systems' policy in Hong Kong, which would enable its capitalist system to continue.

The continued British rule of Hong Kong had gone 'against the decolonisation grain' that had been evident elsewhere in the Empire following the Second World War (Buckley, 1997, 170). Roger Buckley believes that the British remained in Hong Kong for so long because it was mutually beneficial to all parties concerned: 'the British government could point to its administrative successes, the Chinese had the satisfaction of knowing that over half of its trade passed through Hong Kong by the early 1990s and the residents of the territory could expect to be left to get on with their own affairs' (Buckley, 1997, 171). Steve Tsang believes that the situation finally changed because of a tilt in the balance of power: Britain knew that it could not win a war with China to keep control of the territory, meanwhile both countries 'accepted that Hong Kong had become too valuable to risk its destruction' (Tsang, 2004, 268). The transfer of power was not entirely smooth, however. Chris Patten, the last Governor of Hong Kong, angered the Chinese government when he introduced measures that aimed to reinforce democratic power within the territory (Buckley, 1997, 127-35; Tsang, 1997, 189-200).

Although the British government retained overall control of Hong Kong until the handover, in the run-up to this transfer there were some marked changes in the way the territory was run. Discounting the Governor, the senior posts in the Hong Kong government were all held by non-Europeans (Buckley, 1997, 146). Meanwhile, responsibility for security was transferred from the British military to the local Hong Kong police (Buckley, 1997, 147). Buckley believes that Chris Patten was responsible for the 'symbolic undermining of British military prestige in Hong Kong', as he took the decision to remove the military presence from Hong Kong's executive council (Buckley, 1997, 147).

During the early 1990s the Royal Navy was reduced to operating a 'handful of patrol boats' (Buckley, 1997, 147). Their role in Hong Kong during this period was search and rescue, the capture of illegal immigrants, and the prevention of smuggling (Melson, 1997, 129-46). In April 1993 the Navy's last remaining coastal watching station in Hong Kong was closed down, and in May 1993 *HMS Tamar*, the Navy's base in central Hong Kong, was sold off for land development (Melson, 1997, 150). The ships of the Hong Kong squadron took part in the handover ceremonies, but they were then sold on to the Philippines Navy. Following the Chinese takeover, the Navy's base on



Stonecutters Island became the government dockyard, and the Prince of Wales Barracks became the headquarters of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison (Melson, 1997, 150-58).

30 June 1997 was seen by many as the date on which Britain's imperial role finally came to an end. Many of these ambitions were achieved with the support of the British Navy, and the date was certainly seen as significant within that organisation. Lieutenant Commander G. Tilsey remarked that '30<sup>th</sup> June 1997 will see the Royal Navy's final sunset on a British Hong Kong. The Navy has been the guardian and protector here for many years, in a more direct manner than anywhere else in the world. From the congested waters of Victoria Harbour to the choppy, muddy seas of Mirs Bay, the Royal Navy has provided deterrence, support and protection – perhaps the last of this sort of extended, permanent, patrolling presence that the UK will ever require East of Suez' (Melson, 1997, 159).

*Hong Kong Handover* was shot by Sergeant Stuart McKenzie of the Headquarters Land Command Mobile News Team. While earlier military film units shot their footage for the historical record and for publicity purposes, the Mobile News Team was primarily concerned with public relations, and often shot footage that concentrated on individual servicemen, with the aim of securing publicity on regional television.

### **Analysis**

*Hong Kong Handover* is not a film that aims to provide a comprehensive record of the Navy's involvement in the transfer of power in Hong Kong; instead it focuses on some of the final daily operations of the crew of *HMS Plover*. The film's title is not particularly indicative of its content: although it was filmed on 18 June 1997, just 12 days before the handover, and the ship highlighted in the film was featured in the handover ceremonies, the action that takes place is not directly linked with events that took place on 30 June 1997. Nevertheless, the film does provide a valuable document of the final days of British control of the region.

In the first instance, it shows something of the day-to-day operations that *HMS Plover* was involved in. As well as seeing the crew perform some fairly mundane actions on deck, we also get to see pursuit boats launched from the vessel in chase of a civilian boat, which they suspect is involved in smuggling. Navy officers board this boat and inspect the papers of its crew.

Secondly, the film records the thoughts of some of the serving officers. Here, in a series of individual profiles, members of crew are asked about their roles, what they think of Hong Kong, and how they feel about the Navy's departure. Although imbued with military reserve, their responses display a personal attachment to Hong Kong and also a sense of regret that their role will soon be at an end. Lieutenant Commander Garry Sutton states 'I feel sad that we are going, and I feel that we can go out holding our heads high'; Lieutenant David Ward says that he feels 'very sad', but that he was 'lucky to have been here'; Weapon Engineer Neil Moore enjoyed 'horrendously fast' Hong Kong 'very much' and remarks that it is the 'end of an era'; Senior Communicator Steven McSevitt doesn't believe that the Chinese will change Hong Kong too much as 'it's got too much going for it'.

Finally, despite the fact that the film is unstructured and unedited, it does provide the materials for a narrative about the end of power in Hong Kong. There is footage that captures significant places, filmed either from a helicopter or from the ships in the harbour: we see the Prince of Wales Barracks; *HMS Chatham* (a frigate that was used to control military operations during the final months of British sovereignty); Stonecutters Island; and the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (where the handover ceremonies took place). In addition, it is apt that the film finishes with one of the most profound images for British imperialism: a sunset. A common 19<sup>th</sup> century adage maintained that Britain's was 'the empire on which the sun never sets'. Here we see the evening sun reflected in the high rise buildings of the city. The sun goes down over the harbour, setting upon *HMS Chatham* and *HMS Plover*. On board the latter ship we see two naval officers, who salute their flag as it is lowered for one of the final times.

**Richard Osborne (August 2010)**

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Titles

## IN RURAL MAHARASHTRA

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1822>

### Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Running Time:

12 minutes

\* Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

\* Colour:

Black/White

\* Sound:

Sound

\* Footage:

1090

### Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

India

\* Sponsor

Department of Information and Broadcasting

\* Production Company

Films Division, Government of India

### Synopsis

Title card. A village street in Maharashtra. A farmer's wife grinding corn. Her son leading cattle to the fields past a banyan tree. The farmer's wife cleaning out their cowshed. The wife drawing 'an auspicious design' on the ground outside their house. The farmer and his wife smiling at each other. The farmer, harnessing his bullocks and taking them to the fields; he passes by a temple dedicated to Ganapati. Women gathering water from the river in large pots. The farmer's wife making bread, which she takes to her husband in the fields. The village's 'primitive form of irrigation'. The farmer's wife and other village women cultivating cauliflowers. Farmers ploughing the fields using bullocks. Cross-faded shots showing the growth of the corn. The farmer's family in a bullock cart, which heads to the fields for the reaping, threshing and winnowing of the corn. A thanksgiving ceremony for the harvest. Corn loaded in sacks and taken to market. A marriage ceremony and celebratory

dances. The farmer's family head off in a decorated bullock cart to a religious festival in a nearby village. A procession at the festival. The farmer buys flowers from his priest as an offering to the gods. The cattle market at the festival. Entertainment at the festival: carousels and a big wheel; a wrestling match; bullock cart racing; and a physical display by the local regiment of Maharashtra soldiers. Evening time at the festival, a troubadour sings verses 'packed with war and triumph of the most illustrious king in their history: 'Shivaji the great'. A statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji. The farmer, now in military uniform, preparing to depart his village: 'in Maharashtra the farmer is always a soldier'. Another farmer/soldier, surrounded by his family as he departs the village. A line of Indian troops, marching through a village. Indian soldiers marching past the statue of Shivaji and saluting it. Credits. Ends.

### **Context**

In 1943 the Film Advisory Board (FAB), the body that had been created to oversee the production of wartime documentaries in India, was dissolved and Information Films of India (IFI) was created in its place. Under this new organisation the Government of India assumed full responsibility for propaganda films. In addition, the government implemented the Defence of India Rule 44A, effective from September 1943, which required that every cinema in India show at least 2,000 feet of government 'approved' film at each performance. To ensure that the IFI's films reached as wide an audience as possible they were issued in separate English, Hindustani, Bengali, Tamil and Telugu versions ('Note for Cut Motion'). This closer governmental control of film production was a response to two main threats: the unrest in the sub-continent caused by the nationalist Quit India movement, and the growing seriousness of the war in south-east Asia (Garga, 2007, 97).

The Second World War deployed a large amount of Indian resources and manpower. By 1943, India was third only to Britain and Canada in producing goods for war supply (Jackson, 2006, 358). The number of soldiers serving in the Indian Army grew from 205,058 men in October 1939 to 2,251,050 in July 1945, the majority of whom came from rural areas (Brown, 1994, 319; Garga, 2007, 109). The war effort had its effect on the Indian economy, bringing with it both inflation and food shortages (Brown, 1994, 325).

Among the Empire countries India provided the most serious opposition to Britain's War aims. The outbreak of war witnessed the leading Indian political party, the Indian National Congress, resign from government rather than support the war cause, and in 1942 the party launched the 'Quit India' movement, demanding full independence for India.

This otherwise uncredited film was produced by the Prabhat Film Company ‘for the Films Division of the Government of India’ in 1945. Established in 1929, and based in Maharashtra, Prabhat was one of the major Indian film companies of the 1930s (Ganti, 2004, 16). One of its founders and leading directors was V. Shantaram, who left the company in the early 1940s and went on to serve as production chief at the FAB (Garga, 2007, 80). However, by the time the IFI was created Shantaram had resigned from his post (Woods, 2001, 293). His production duties were taken over by Ezra Mir, who gradually steered IFI films away from War propaganda towards films that dealt with the socio-economic and cultural life of Indian people (Garga, 2007, 108-09). *In Rural Maharashtra*, in fact, deals with both aims.

The IFI’s films were primarily aimed at an Indian audience (Brock 1945), but some of them also received a non-theatrical distribution in the UK. *In Rural Maharashtra* was reviewed in relation to its educational value by the British movie press, receiving qualified praise (*MFB*, 13 October 1946, 144).

Maharashtra is located on the western coast of India, but its size and status have altered over time. Until the seventeenth century much of the area that now constitutes Maharashtra was under Mughal rule. The credit for founding the Maratha Empire is given to the general Chhatrapati Shivaji (1627-1680), who during his lifetime reclaimed much of India from Muslim rule. The British defeated the Marathas in the third Anglo-Maratha war (1817-1818) and subsequently most of Maharashtra became part of Bombay State. Following independence, demands were made for a unification of Marathi speaking regions under one state; Maharashtra was formed in 1960, becoming the third largest state in India. Agriculture continues to be the dominant occupation in the state, and the primary religion is Hinduism (Tikekar, 1966, 13-18).

### **Analysis**

In an article that actually praises the film, the *Documentary News Letter* stated of *In Rural Maharashtra* that it was ‘flung together, very uneven to look at and as haphazard as a film could be’ (*DNL*, 1945, 103). While the film is uneven, it is not casually made. What instead renders it haphazard is its contradictory aims. It attempts to provide a factual account of the rural life of Maharashtra, but this portrait is affected by the need to idealise this life. Furthermore, the film is complicated by its propaganda purpose: a need to encourage the drive for military recruitment.

Like many other rural documentaries about India (and indeed other locations), *In Rural Maharashtra* depicts a land that is unchanging. We hear of the 'daily round, the same time for each new task each day', and learn that 'hundreds of years ago these families would have looked the same'. Various devices are employed to convey the circularity of this life. The film portrays a day in the life of a farming family, taking us from dawn until dusk. Within this conventional narrative structure we also get a movement through the seasons, from ploughing through to harvest time and autumnal celebrations. There is also a movement from the village towards the market town. However, the neat patterning of the film falters with the closing segment, which unexpectedly depicts a second excursion for the family, as they head out to a fair. It is here that military recruitment is mentioned for the first time.

Again, like several other Indian documentaries, this film stresses primitive farming methods: a milling wheel is of 'ancient design' and the village uses 'one of the most primitive forms of irrigation'. However, it does take care to show working methods in some detail. Multiple camera shots are employed to show the processes of sowing, reaping, and food preparation. Although the location of the village is not given, the filmmakers do illustrate some distinct local features: 'From the way these women wear their saris and the style of the temple, from the Banyan tree, we know we are in Maharashtra'. Similarly, the people's festivals and customs are outlined carefully and with a restraint from condescension.

This film stresses harmony, both within the farming family and between that family and the land. Correspondingly, the actors are constantly smiling at one another. There is also a bizarre sequence in which the wife cradles a giant cauliflower and kisses it like a baby. Inauthenticity is apparent in other parts of the film. A dance sequence in the market town employs character actors, and in the cauliflower fields there is further choreography: a line of women pick their vegetables in unison.

In its review of the film the *Monthly Film Bulletin* complained that 'some scenes were not only acted but idealised and one wonders how many of the rest suffered in the same way' (*MFB*, October 1946, 144). This intermingling of fact and fiction serves one of the film's purposes, however. It produces an image of a fecund land with a fecund people, ripe for recruitment for the War. There is attempted subtlety in the film's introduction of its military theme. We first get a glimpse of an Indian in khaki at the celebrations in the market town. Next there is a display by the local regiment of Maharashtra soldiers at the local fair. However, the film tests our credulity by now arguing that the harmonious Maharashtra villagers are 'first and foremost a martial people'. This is illustrated by cutting to a

wrestling match, and then by recounting the story of Shivaji. The film attempts to reconcile its aims by returning to tradition, stating that 'these twentieth century soldiers are dressed in khaki, but their ceremonial of departure is the same as it was in Shivaji's great days'. The new characterisation of the Maharashtra people in these scenes, and the way in which these scenes affect the overall structure of the film, makes them feel as though they are tagged on. As such, the film unwittingly conveys something of the intrusion of the War into everyday life.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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Titles

## **INDIA AT WAR**

\* MARCH OF TIME 8TH YEAR NO. 2

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/114>

### Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Running Time:

19 minutes

\* Colour:

Black/White

### Production Credits

Maurice Lancaster - director of production

Victor Jurgens – cameraman

Robert Nabarro – cameraman

Westbrook Van Voorhis - commentary

\* Production Countries:

USA

\* Production Company

Time Inc

### **Synopsis**

Survey of the British Empire in 1944 and the future problems with which it is likely to be faced.

### **Colonial Film Synopsis**

Titles. Long lines of Indian troops advancing towards camera. A busy Indian street, with statue of British monarch visible in the background. Billboard with cartoon picture of Churchill saying, 'To the question what is our aim. I can give the answer in one word. . it is VICTORY. VICTORY AT ALL COSTS. VICTORY. VICTORY IN SPITE OF ALL PERIL. VICTORY. HOWEVER LONG AND HARD THE ROAD MAY BE'. Allied troops under the command of 'Britain's number one soldier', Sir Archibald Wavell; they are gathering to prevent what 'they most fear: a meeting of the Axis armies, German and Japanese on the plains of India'. Indian civilians unloading military vehicles from a boat. Indian in uniform on a mountain ridge. Construction workers in the mountains. Pilots and aeroplanes of the American Volunteer Group. Three English officers talking together. American military disembarking from a boat and enjoying the sights in an Indian town.



Military planes in flight. Jawaharlal Nehru addressing a large crowd: 'the leaders of India's powerful National Congress party have refused all active co-operation with Britain and the United States in defence of their own home'. Political procession, amongst the crowd are Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. Chinese leaders in discussion with Nehru. Gandhi with spinning wheel: 'Gandhi and his disciples announced that they would not be armed, but would meet the enemy with their own peculiar weapon: passive resistance'. Sikh wearing jacket decorated with medals. Indian men enlisting: 'today a majority of the Indian people know that the one way of getting the independence they have so long sought is by giving fullest support to the United Nations in their fight against the enemies of all freedom and all free men'.

Indian soldiers on a parade ground; an elderly British official awards a medal to an Indian soldier. Indian troops boarding a train. Indian troops boarding a ship: 'the Indian soldier has lacked neither courage nor endurance but only what the United Nations have everywhere lacked in these first years: tanks and fighting planes'. Indian troops using horse-drawn carts. English-styled architecture in an Indian hill town. The Himalayan Mountains. The Khyber Pass. Shots filmed from British naval vessels at sea: 'like the other western nations the British Empire was loud and complacent and its military men consistently under-rated the legions of little goose-stepping men who were busy in the crowded Empire of Japan, thousands of miles away beyond the China seas'. Title-card: 'For almost four hundred years, India, along with the rest of Asia, has been marked for conquest by Japan's scheming warriors'.

Scenes from Japan: Japanese men striking a large bell; a seated Buddha; Japanese at a pagoda; a military statue; soldiers bowing; inspection of troops; leaders in a rural retreat; a cartoon of Toyotomi Hideyoshi; marching troops; generals discussing plans; female telephone operators; a vehicle assembly plant; soldiers in the snow. Scenes of the Japanese attack on China in 1937. Japanese troops exiting a gateway that has a union jack painted on it. Japanese troops marching in front of members of the Indian navy who stand to attention. A Japanese man painting over the union flag on a wall. English naval troops stood to attention; Japanese and British officers shake hands. Japanese lookout in the turret of a ship. The Japanese bombing of the USS *Panay* in 1937. Naval boats at sea. An American naval residence in the Pacific. Japanese leaders attending a night-time parade. Front page of *Daily News*: 'JAPS BOMB HAWAII'. Japanese planes in flight; bombs being dropped. American troops marching. Japanese troops storming a Chinese building. Japanese troops advancing. Intertitle: 'Today, Japan's armies, consolidating their grip on China, see in India the key to the final conquest of the whole of Asia'. Teeming streets in India: 'nowhere outside of

China is there so vast a repertoire of manpower for labour and for fighting, as India's 400 million people'. Government buildings in New Delhi. Viceroy Linlithgow. British and Indian members of the Indian government sat at a table. Indian women working in a telephone operating room. The British coat of arms. British officials formal receiving visitors in a palatial building: 'under British rule, the security of India, half as big as the United States, and three times as populous, has never been entrusted to the Indian people'. General Wavell meeting other military officers. A 'Command Conference' in which senior officers discuss plans.

A crowd of Indians in a dockyard. Indians fixing naval boats. Naval boats in a dry dock being repaired by Indians. Indians constructing new naval boats. Indian naval troops marching in a parade ground. Indian volunteers learning naval routine in a training college. Planes of the Indian Air Force being readied for action. Pilots of the Indian Air Force preparing for flight. Exterior of Indian factories: India's 'contribution to final victory, even more than the numbers, skill and bravery of its fighting men, may be its natural resources and the productive capacity of its expanding war industries'. Construction of military vehicles in an Indian factory. Indian workers in a mill. A naval convoy at sea. An Indian dockyard. Indian workers in an armaments factory. The Tata steelworks. Shots of various Indian factory workers: 'Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and others – their political and religious difference put aside – are working hard and loyally to help bring Victory to the United Nations'. Film concludes by saying that these Indian factory workers 'are confident, that as partners of the world's free people, sharing all the burdens and hardships of the war for survival, they will gain at last what they have so long been denied: the right to live as free men in a united and independent India. Title card. Ends.

### **Context**

Ashley Jackson writes that 'India, the non-white Empire's most politically sophisticated territory, was the centre of the most serious resistance to the British war effort found anywhere in the Empire' (Jackson, 2006, 381). This manifested itself most clearly in the actions of the Indian National Congress, the predominantly Hindu political party, which resigned from government at the outbreak of the War rather than support the Allied cause.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, Britain was in increased need of co-operation: the Japanese now posed a threat to India, and the War also required increased Indian resources and manpower. Consequently, in March 1942 the British despatched Sir Stafford Cripps to India with the aim of eliciting nationalist support.

The resultant 'Cripps Offer' promised that, in return for co-operation during the war, India could have full Dominion status or the option to secede from the Commonwealth once the war had concluded. There was also a proviso that no part of India could be forced to join the new state. Disliking this opt-out clause the INC rejected the offer in April 1942, and instead embarked upon the open rebellion of the 'Quit India' movement. India's other leading political party, the Muslim League, also rejected the offer. Cripps' proviso is nevertheless an indication of their increasing influence. The party's Lahore Resolution of March 1940 called for a separate and self-ruled Muslim homeland within the sub-continent.

There was also support for the War within India. Indians volunteered at the rate of 50,000 a month (there was no conscription in the country), and the Indian army grew quickly from about 200,000 men in 1939 to 900,000 by the end of 1941, and peaked at 2,600,000 men in 1945 (Jackson, 2006, 358). India was also transformed economically. The country produced more wartime supplies than Australia, New Zealand and South Africa combined (Jackson, 2006, 358).

Jackson has argued that because of India's military and industrial support 'a return to humdrum peace-time imperial rule in the post-war years was greatly diminished.' (Jackson, 2006, 354). Judith Brown notes the importance of non-co-operation in securing India's freedom. She states that 'the Cripps Offer was the point at which the British departure after the war became inevitable. As even Churchill recognized, there could be no retraction of the offer of independence' (Brown, 1994, 328).

In November 1940, Rita Andre of the American film company, *March of Time*, requested the British government's permission to make a feature that would cover 'as much of the Indian scene as we can film, including India's war effort' (Garga, 2007, 87). *March of Time* had been launched in 1935 as an offshoot of the magazine, *Time*, and quickly grew to be the most popular news report of its day: By 1938 it was being distributed to around 11,000 cinemas worldwide (Bohn and Lichty, 1973, 377-78).

Due to the strong tide of anti-imperialist feeling in America, the British government had concerns about how they would be portrayed (Garga, 2007, 88). They nevertheless endorsed the *March of Time* project, believing that it would provide an 'opportunity to put across their idea of the benevolence of British rule in India to a global audience' (Garga, 2007, 88). Filming of an approved script began in October 1941, when Maurice Lancaster, director of production, and the cameraman Victor Jurgens arrived in India (they would later be joined by the cameraman Robert Nabarro) (Garga, 2007, 88). The team remained in India for a number of months, shooting over 30,000 feet of film

(Garga, 2007, 89). The film was not completed until 1942, and is reflective of events taking place that year. It was divided into two parts: *India in Crisis* and *India at War*.

### Analysis

One of the peculiarities of *March of Time*'s two Indian news reports is that it is the military film *India at War*, rather than the political documentary *India in Crisis*, that is most overt in supporting India's desire for independence. As such, *India at War* was the more problematic of the films for Britain's politicians and critics.

The film's argument is made circuitously. It begins by outlining the threat posed to India by the Axis powers and then argues against the non-co-operative stance that the Indian National Congress has made. It criticises Gandhi for ignoring the pleas made by China for military support, and the commentary denigrates the stance of passive resistance. Here, images of party members using their 'symbolic' spinning wheels are used to demonstrate their impotence in the face of the Japanese threat. The film then shows various scenes of Indians recruiting. It argues that 'today a majority of the Indian people know that the one way of getting the independence they have so long sought is by giving fullest support to the United Nations in their fight against the enemies of freedom and all free men'. At the close of the film we witness the opposite of the manual spinning wheel: Indians are shown in factories, manufacturing war supplies. The film stresses the numerical weight of this drive: there are 'millions of labourers and craftsmen' carrying out these trades. It also stresses the widespread nature of the support. These men are 'Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and others; their political and religious difference put aside'. The film then underlines the point that it has already made in relation to recruitment: in conclusion it states that Indians 'are confident, that as partners of the world's free people, sharing all the burdens and hardships of the war for survival, they will gain at last what they have so long been denied: the right to live as free men in a united and independent India'.

It was the statements about independence that upset officials in London. Alec Joyce, information officer at the India Office, argued that the film's summary 'does not do justice to the facts', and suggested that *March of Time* alter phrases such as 'so long sought' and 'so long been denied' (Garga, 2007, 90). *March of Time* refused to oblige. These same statements brought forth complaints from members of the British public. Writing to *The Times* G. Burniston-Brown sated that 'I doubt whether Dr. Goebbels himself could produce anything more subtly misleading and anti-British' (Garga, 2007, 90).

If the film can be regarded as being anti-British, it can also be viewed as being pro-American, or at least pro the American way of life. The commentary denigrates 'distant' British rule and the fact that power 'has never been entrusted to the Indian people'; statements that are backed up with scenes of an elaborate state ceremony taking place in a cavernous hall. The film then argues for 'full US co-operation in organising and developing India's own reserves of manpower and Industry', and in this sense marks the interests of the USA in breaking up the Empire to facilitate American trade and capital. India's move towards independence is coupled with the idea of the country becoming an 'industrial establishment'; in this film shots of industrial India outnumber those of India at war. In the first of the Indian *March of Time* films, *India in Crisis*, the achievements of India's political parties and the making of the Cripps Offer are outlined. However, it is notable that in this film, the one that actually envisions freedom for India, Indian politics take a backseat. Instead it is posited that freedom will be achieved by supporting the fight for democracy and by attaining competence in capitalist trades.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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Titles

## **INDIA IN CRISIS**

\* MARCH OF TIME 8TH YEAR NO. 1

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6681>

Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Running Time:

18 minutes

\* Film Gauge (Format):

\* Colour:

Black/White

Production Credits

Maurice Lancaster - director of production

Victor Jurgens – cameraman

Robert Nabarro – cameraman

Westbrook Van Voorhis – commentary

\* Production Countries:

USA

\* Production Company

Time Inc

## **Synopsis**

Part one of Indian problems. Consideration of political division at the time of Cripps unsuccessful trip which prevent India from helping the Allies and make her an easy prey for Japan. Gandhi wants only independence, and opposes the British, in spite of the threat.

## **Colonial Film Synopsis**

Titles. Elephants heading along a road. A wide plain in India. Aeroplanes flying in formation and dropping bombs; Indians looking up in the air for the aircraft: 'to no people has war come with more shock and terror than to the 400 million Indian people'. A relief map of India. Japanese troops in action. Busy Indian streets: 'in India the enemy sees not a united and vigorous nation but a huge sprawling subcontinent who, divided one against the other, are preoccupied with their own political aspirations'. The 'sainted' Mahatma Gandhi, walking along a road with followers; he is the 'personification of the only unity India has ever known'. Indian men listening to an address by Jawaharlal Nehru and other members of the Indian National Congress. Muslims worshipping in the

courtyard of a large mosque: they 'fear that an independent India would mean Hindu domination under which they would become no more than a persecuted minority'. Mohammed Ali Jinnah at a table with other politicians: 'he demands that Britain create a separate and independent state out of those provinces in which Muslims predominate'. Outline of a potential Pakistan is shown on the relief map. Party chiefs of the Hindu Mahasabha political party. Indian men listening to a loudspeaker: 'among many of the Indian people is dawning the realisation that whatever their grievances might have been, their mortal enemy today is not Britain, but the Axis, Germany and Japan'. Indian radio announcer, broadcasting that 'the misunderstandings and mis-dealings among ourselves and between ourselves and England seem small indeed behind the magnitude of our present peril'. Title card: 'Huge, complex and baffling – the problem of India has for generations defied the efforts of Britain's ablest statesmen'. Goods vessels in a dockyard: 'British dominance in India began with the great trading monopoly, which London's East India company established and developed from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries'. Troops on horseback. Statue of Queen Victoria: 'by 1858 parliament had placed the East India company's vast domain under the crown'. Motor cars in a city street. A Union Flag flying from a ruined fort. Hindus descending ghats into a river: Hinduism 'in its extremist form renders the introduction of western standards of progress exceedingly difficult'. Yogis sat cross-legged before a temple. A parade for a Hindu god. A Hindu cremation. Untouchables in Indian streets: 'in spite of all efforts by the British and by Indians like Gandhi to improve their lot they remain outcasts'. Market scenes in a city. Men planting rice in a paddy field. Indian children in a school; Indian women in a college; Indian youths in an engineering college: 'while the British have governed in India, they have also served, to the betterment of millions of Indians'. Wealthy Indians at a racecourse. An Indian regal procession in Mysore. City scenes in Mysore, which has experienced 'a measure of progress unsurpassed in any native state or colony'. Men working in Indian factories. A 'British-built' dam. Farmers tending crops; commentary mentions the country's over-population. Footage of factory workers: 'if this potential reservoir of labour [...] could be fully utilised to enlarge India's already huge industrial establishment and concentrated on war production . . .'. Production of arms in Indian factories: 'it was Japan's fear of this enormous war potential, as much as it's desire to smash the British empire where it had been made vulnerable by native disunity, that launched the Japanese armies on the pathway to India; and it was Japan's imminent invasion that moved Britain's wartime statesmen to a final effort, which they hoped would solve the old problem of India's freedom. Title card: "We have tried to help India along her road to victory and freedom but past distrust has proved too strong to allow a present settlement" – Sir Stafford Cripps. New Delhi, India. April 1942'. Indian men in a large field at a political rally. Document outlining the 'India Proposals' of the Cripps' Offer. Footage of British

people in an Indian hill town. Troops marching through an archway. Government buildings: 'to a people who have never known anything but the harsh rule of autocrats [the British] have brought enlightened government, even-handed customs, and a first glimmering of constitutional laws'. Troops marching through an old fort. Nehru addressing large crowds at a political rally: 'today millions of people throughout the united nations are watching India with grave anxiety for they know that in the outcome of the great struggle for control of Asia, India's own inner struggle – racial, national and religious – must inevitably play a large part'. Gandhi, flanked by followers. Title cards. Ends.

### Context

In November 1940 Rita Andre of the American film company, *March of Time*, requested the British government's permission to make a feature that would cover 'as much of the Indian scene as we can film, including India's war effort' (Garga, 2007, 87). The company was originally most interested in covering Gandhi's means of resistance to colonial rule; however, by the time of the film's completion in 1942 its remit had been expanded to take into account contemporary events. During this period the USA had entered the war and the political situation in India had intensified.

At the outbreak of World War II India's leading political party, the Indian National Congress (INC), resigned from government rather than support the British War. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, Britain was in increased need of the INC's co-operation: the Japanese now posed a direct threat to India; the War required increased Indian resources and manpower; and there was also the need to placate American allies, many of whom, including President Roosevelt, were opposed to colonialism (Stockwell, 2001, 476). Consequently, in March 1942 the British despatched Sir Stafford Cripps to India with the aim of eliciting nationalist support. The resultant 'Cripps Offer' promised that, in return for co-operation during the war, India could have full Dominion status or the option to secede from the Commonwealth once the War had concluded. There was also a proviso that no part of India could be forced to join the new state. Disliking this opt-out clause the INC rejected the offer in April 1942, and instead embarked upon the open rebellion of the 'Quit India' movement. India's other leading political party, the Muslim League, also rejected the offer. Cripps' proviso is nevertheless an indication of their increasing influence. The party's Lahore Resolution of March 1940 called for a separate and self-ruled Muslim homeland within the sub-continent.



*March of Time* began in 1935 as an offshoot of the magazine, *Time*, and quickly grew to be the most popular filmed news report of its day; by 1938 it was being distributed to around 11,000 cinemas world-wide (Bohn and Lichty, 1973, 377-78). The reports were innovative in style: mixing documentary footage with re-enactments of news events; using abrupt cuts rather than wipes and dissolves; employing dramatic music to underscore the action; and using commentaries, provided by Westbrook Van Voorhis, that did not always follow the visual materials (Bohn and Lichty, 1973, 379-81).

Despite concerns regarding how they would be portrayed, the British government endorsed the *March of Time* project, believing that it would provide an 'opportunity to put across their idea of the benevolence of British rule in India to a global audience' (Garga, 2007, 88). Filming of an approved script began in October 1941, when Maurice Lancaster, director of production, and the cameraman Victor Jurgens arrived in India (they would later be joined by the cameraman Robert Nabarro) (Garga, 2007, 88). The team remained in India for a number of months, shooting over 30,000 feet of film (Garga, 2007, 89). Rather than sticking to the original script they also filmed contemporary events. Nevertheless, the British government took the 'calculated risk' of allowing their footage to be shipped back to America uncensored (Garga, 2007, 89).

The final edited film was divided into two parts, *India in Crisis* (1942) and *India at War* (1942), each of which runs for twenty minutes. *India in Crisis* details the war situation and the various nationalist political parties, as well as providing background information about the sub-continent.

### **Analysis**

*India in Crisis* provides a filmic equivalent of the Cripps Offer: it acknowledges Indian demands for independence, but at the same time wishes to enlist the country's support for the War cause.

The film's message is conveyed via its structure. Its military emphasis is in evidence in its opening, which outlines the dangers of an Axis attack upon India. Here, there is also an early outlining of the country's population mass. The film then argues that India represents an 'easy conquest', the reason being that it is politically divided. This information colours its following sketches of India's political leaders: Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah. The film then looks back, providing an historical outline of 'the problem of India'. It is argued that Indian society is frequently incompatible with western forms of progress. Therefore, the blame for India's lack of agricultural and technological advancement, which is the subject of the next section, is placed upon Indians themselves. The film then provides a

contrast, outlining the prosperity of those areas of India that have adopted British democratic and technological methods. Finally, the film ties its themes together, arguing that a full utilisation of India's manpower and resources, and a setting aside of political differences, could turn the War in Asia.

Despite its War aims, the film provides a more supportive view of Indian political ambitions that can be witnessed in British-sponsored films of the same period. It believes that any large colonised populace should have the 'strength to throw off their conquerors and stand alone as a nation'. Indian leaders are accorded a significant amount of screen time and there is no use of disparaging language when describing their actions. The 'sainted' Mahatma Gandhi is described as being the 'personification of the only unity India has ever known'. By closing with footage of Gandhi at his ashram, the film indicates that the future of the country lies with his actions. Nevertheless, in this film we do not get to hear the Indian leaders speak, and the music that accompanies their images could at times be said to indicate danger. The only Indian voice heard on the soundtrack is instead that of a radio announcer, who states that 'The misunderstandings and mis-dealings among ourselves, and between ourselves and England, seem small indeed behind the magnitude of our present peril'.

Where the Allied war cause has most clearly affected the film is in its representation of British rule. The film argues that the British have 'served to the betterment of millions of Indians', and that they have 'brought material progress'. It is even suggested that it is enlightened British rule, and not British repression, that has given birth to the nationalist movement: the introduction of democratic ideals has led Indians to demand 'their share of freedom', and nationalist leaders have benefited from British-sponsored education. Reflective of the film's argument that Indians have gained an 'ever-increasing measure of freedom', British leadership is notable by its absence. Screen time in this film is predominantly given to Indians; representation of the central government is conveyed by exterior shots of official buildings, and not by showing the British parliamentarians within.

To convey its message this film employs several of *March of Time's* noted tactics. From its beginning it is dramatic, opening with a scrolling script which states that what follows is 'so timely and so revealing that the story it tells requires extra time on the screen'. The opening footage splices material from various sources to create an imagined account of a Japanese air attack on India. There are further dramatised moments, such as the footage of the Indian radio announcer, and the turning of pages in an outsized book that purports to be the Cripps Offer. The film's abrupt editing conveys

both dynamism and the need for resolution. The commentary meanwhile offers a further perspective on the action, sometimes running counter to the film's images. For example, in a passage that talks of the contrast between India's wealth and poverty, we only get to see wealthy elements of Indian society. This practice wasn't necessarily appreciated by the British press: the *Monthly Film Bulletin* complained that the commentary 'is not in harmony with the film and does not keep pace with it' (MFB, 1942, 136). Nevertheless, the British press was largely supportive of the way in which the film had conveyed Indian matters. *The Cinema* commended it for paying 'high tribute to what Britain has done for Indian people' (TC, 1 July 1942, 20), while the *Kinematograph Weekly* stated that it had done a 'magnificent job' of recounting India's complex issues (KW, 9 July 1942, 23).

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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**INDIAN BACKGROUND**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/111>

Title Ref: Sift 242640

Director:

Prod. Country: GB

Year: 1946

1st Release: 1946

Prod. Company: Crown Film Unit

Release Country:

Release date: 1946

Format:

Run Time (Mins): 10

Length:

Colour Code: B

Colour System:

Sound System: SOUN

Language:

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

Credits

Production Company	Crown Film Unit
Sponsor	Central Office of Information
Editor	CUMMINS, Sylvia

**Additional credits**

Treatment and Commentary Written by	SOMMERFIELD, John
Spoken by	STAGG, John
Spoken by	WLADMAN, Ronald
Spoken by	SHELLEY, Norman
Musical Adviser	MENON, Narayana

**Synopsis**

Credits. Crowd of Indians. Commentary states that among the contradictions of India a new nation is being born. Boys begging. Images of Gandhi, Jinah and Nehru. Banner reading 'Pakistan is our goal'. Male protesters from the B.P.T. Employees Union. A crowd, possibly following a religious

idol. Panned shot across a village. Old woman cleaning a bowl. Women carrying pots on their heads. Women at village well. Plough pulled by oxen. Villager using leads to move a scarecrow. Bare-chested Indian shaking grain from a container. Women beating grain with sticks. Footage from *Hillmen Go to War* (1944): young woman clipping tea; boy clipping tea; close-up of tea plant; old woman sifting tea. Old man at work on a loom. Young girl operating spinning wheel. Young women and men winding balls of cloth. Man using bicycle wheel to spin cloth. Two boys using a saw. Men sawing through a large tree trunk. Footage from *Hillmen Go to War*: Boy crushing chestnuts. Women threshing straw. Twine being thread. Woman making fabric using spinning wheel. Women making rope. Children transporting rope in their canoes. Men carrying wood strapped to their backs. Stacked wood, which is then winched across hills. Men make chute of planks, which they then use to transfer further planks down. Footage from *In Rural Maharashtra* (1945): a line of oxen carts heading down a road. Footage from *Hillmen Go to War*:

Men with crates tied to their backs. Oxen pulling logs along a rail. Donkeys with goods strapped to their backs. Two Indians open the doors to the yard of 'Union Plywood Product'. Bullock cart carrying tree trunks enters the yard. Interior of a factory, processing timber. Men in 'spooling section' of a factory. Boy crouched on a rope. Factory workers manufacturing rope. Workers using stencil to make patterns on cloth. Two men unfurl a large roll of cloth. Worker mending sandals in his workshop. Large factory with one worker visible among the machines. Men at work on industrial presses. Men in factory working at looms. Indians at work in a large metal foundry. Machine creating sheets of metal. Men at work on a conveyor belt. Footage from *War Pictorial News No. 51* (1942): worker using large pincers. Footage from *Hillmen Go to War*: Dancers at village festival; idols being tilted towards each other. Footage from *In Rural Maharashtra*: Elaborately dressed bride and groom in wedding ceremony; married couple being anointed; celebratory dancing. A dancing bear. Indian jazz trumpeter. Europeans and Indians dancing to jazz music. Shots of the jazz band. Shots looking down on teeming city streets. High-rise buildings. Art Deco office block. Hospital buildings. Shot looking down on an operating table. The exterior of the 'Forest Research Laboratory'. Lush crops labelled 'study of tillage and manure'. Workers inspecting crops. Indians working in a laboratory in lab coats. Woman in sari looking at samples through a magnifying glass. Indian among laboratory equipment. European conducting laboratory experiments. Indian woman using a handloom. Bearded old man. Indian workers in western clothing. Shots of factory workers. Machinery and workers illuminated by factory furnace. Footage from *War Pictorial News No. 51*: worker using large pincers. Ends.

## Context

*Indian Background*, produced in 1946, is comprised of footage re-edited from several wartime Indian documentaries. The practice of re-editing material was fairly common (see Ministry of Information letter, 29 June 1943, referring to this practice), but seldom involved the use of quite so many different films. The Crown Film Unit assembled this film for the British Government's Central Office of Information, the peacetime successor to the Ministry of Information. It was edited by Sylvia Cummins, who had previously been responsible for a number of war documentaries, including *Report from Burma* (1945) and *Fiji Return* (1945). It has not been possible to establish the credentials of the film's writer, John Sommerfield, but it is possible that he is the British communist author who was responsible for the novels *May Day* (1935) and *Trouble in Porter Street* (1939). The 'musical advisor' for this film was Narayana Menon, noted scholar of Indian dance and music. *Indian Background* was released in Britain in late 1946, receiving short descriptive notices in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* (MFB, 1946, 12) and *The Cinema* (TC, 18 September 1946, 35).

By 1946 it was generally assumed that India would gain independence from Britain. Throughout the twentieth century various steps had been made towards India achieving this status, however Judith Brown argues that it was only after the War that the British conceded that 'withdrawal was essential – and not for India but for British national and Imperial interests' (Brown, 2001, 439). She argues that India was becoming an economic liability rather than an asset to Britain; that the country was of less strategic importance geographically; and that it was becoming ungovernable. As such the British 'calculated that alliance with a free India within the Commonwealth was preferable to continued dominion' (Brown, 2001, 444). The pace and scale of change had yet to be determined. Although the Lahore Resolution of 1940 had posited the idea of a separate state of Pakistan, partition was not a certainty (Brown, 1994, 332). Moreover, the current Viceroy, Lord Wavell, was proposing a staged withdrawal from power (Louis, 2001, 332).

World War II had prompted an expansion of industry in India, with a particular growth in the production of steel, chemicals, paper, paint and cement (Brown, 1994, 351). There was also a steady expansion of the urban population: from 13% in 1941 to 16% in 1951 (Brown, 1994, 351). Village life remained relatively unchanged, however, and the country's agricultural base remained in need of major reform (Brown, 1994, 350-31).

## Analysis

*Indian Background* is notable for two main reasons. The first is the way in which it represents the Government's filmmaking response to the changing political climate in India. The second is the way in which it reinterprets previously issued film footage. The film itself is comprised of three sections: its opening outlines the current political situation in India; its main central section is its 'Indian background', a survey of the principal characteristics of life in the sub-continent; and its conclusion ponders how India will progress.

The film begins with sequences showing large Indian crowds. These are shot from a number of angles, but often with the cameraman looking down from a vantage point. Not only does this help to emphasise the scale of the crowds, it also produces a level of separation between the cameraman/viewer and the mass of people below. These crowd scenes are intercut with footage of the leading political figures of the day: Gandhi, Jinnah and Nehru. The commentary meanwhile tells an old story about India being a land of contrasts: rich and poor; old and new; Hindu and Muslim. Although this set of oppositions is related to some of the images on display, it is notable that none of the leaders is mentioned by name. Instead the commentary emphasises the fact that it is among contradictions that 'a nation is being born'.

The film then provides its 'Indian background'. It first posits a belief that is familiar from many other British documentaries – that 'the life of India is in the villages' – and moreover uses materials from previous rural films to underline this point. The tone and the re-use of materials are startling. The film pours almost vindictive scorn on the backwardness of farming communities, where tools have 'not altered in a 1000 years' and where 'to live is an achievement of which there is little to be remembered'. It condemns both child and adult labour. A sequence from *Hillmen Go To War* (1944), originally used to illustrate the increased productivity and wealth of the villagers, is now accompanied by the information that 'much work, little food and the long summer's brutal heat age the peasants before their time'. Footage from *In Rural Maharashtra* (1940), showing the villagers crops on their way to market, is now accompanied by talk of global exploitation: 'the peasant is the producer, but most of his product goes from him, a journey that takes it into another world'. Both of the earlier films feature traditional village celebrations, where life is praised for its 'harmony' and the festivities are termed 'exciting'. Re-used here the commentator states that 'tradition is an invisible tyranny that binds the villager to his heritage of poverty, dirt, ignorance and disease'. The commentary doesn't always subvert the original use of the film materials, however. The camerawork of the earlier films is commonly their most sympathetic aspect in terms of highlighting the dignity of

the people. Now accompanied by a wholly partisan commentary, the images and the rhetoric are often at odds.

It is with mechanised India that this film throws in its lot, in keeping with the enthusiasms of many contemporaneous official productions about industry on Britain's own shores. The film cuts abruptly from footage of rural industry to scenes of a large factory. 'Now that's more like it', the commentator says. He turns away from the trope of depicting the sub-continent by means of its village life, stating that 'this is happening in India too'. Footage from *War Pictorial News No. 51* (1942), originally used to illustrate the contribution of India's factories and factory workers to the war cause, is now used to highlight general Indian mechanisation. The commentator instructs us that 'it's no use sentimentalising about machines destroying old crafts and old ways of living'; these are 'changes for the better'.

In conclusion the film returns to the contradictions of India. The footage of traditional celebrations is cut sharply into an image of urban nightlife. Next the film shows several shots of scientific buildings, among them a college of agriculture, and contemplates 'how are these able to flourish in the same land and century as the villages rooted in the past?' (here an image of a woman working a handloom is perhaps used to link this Gandhi-inspired practice with a dangerously backwards-looking India). The film calls for 'changes in men's minds'. It argues for an India of technical progress, and it makes it clear from where this progress will be derived. The images of scientific endeavour are accompanied by western music, and the commentary states that the future 'will inevitably be shaped by western methods'. Nevertheless, the parade of contradictory images has rendered the filmmakers uncertain. This surprisingly complex, ambivalent, even confused film reflects the current tumult of India. 'It's hard to understand what all this adds up to', the commentator admits.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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Titles

## **JUTE**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/28>

### Technical Data

\* Year:

1923 (circa)

\* Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

\* Colour:

Black/White

\* Sound:

Silent

\* Footage:

1882

### Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

Great Britain

\* Sponsor

Thomas Duff & Co

### **Synopsis**

The film shows the day-to-day running of the Titaghur Jute Company, which is in Bengal on the banks of the river Hooghly. Opening shot 360 degree pan of industrial buildings. 7,000 Indian workers are employed, mostly women and children. There are parks for the children to play in. We follow the process from jute to cloth women working at looms in the factory (very dark), shots of power plant. Schools and workers accommodations. Shots of trains and boats, loading.

### **Context**

Long cultivated in the Bengal region of India, jute is a vegetable fibre that when processed is suitable for spinning into yarn. Jute cloth is coarse and is used commercially for making rope, sacks, and cordage. It can also be used to make other fabrics, such as hessian cloth, scrim and canvas.

Since the mid-nineteenth century the British jute trade has been centred in Dundee. The Dundee textile industry, previously based primarily on flax, developed jute processing techniques in the

aftermath of the Crimean war, during which supplies of raw flax from Russia had become unreliable. The discovery that jute fibres gained strength and flexibility by steeping in whale oil gave the Dundee textile industry an advantage, since the city was also a whaling station. In 1839 Dundee obtained a direct trade agreement with India, and from 1840 began to import raw jute in large quantities (Heseltine, 1981, 40).

The Indian jute trade became concentrated in the Calcutta area. In 1855 the first of several Scottish-owned mills was established on the Hooghly River. By 1890 the Calcutta mills were matching the output of those on Dundee, and by 1913 they were exceeding them fourfold. Between 1900 and 1947, the number of mills on the Hooghly expanded from 35 to 106, and the number of workers employed in them trebled, from 110,000 at the turn of the century to 319,300 by 1946-7 (Goswami, 1991, 11). During the high point of its expansion in the 1920s, jute was India's biggest export earner: in 1920-1 it accounted for 29 per cent of all exports, more than cotton or grain (Stewart, 1998, 13).

The film *Jute* was produced in 1923 by Thomas Duff and Co. Ltd, one of the 'big five' manufacturers who at the time controlled over half of the jute industry in Calcutta (Goswami, 1991, 15-16). Born in Dundee, Duff had been involved in the jute trade in Calcutta since 1859, when he had first been employed by the Borneo Jute Company. In 1872 he opened the first of three of his own mills on the Hooghly River, the Samnuggur. It was followed by the Titaghur (1883), which provides the location for this film, and the Victoria (1885) (Wallace, 1928, 36, 45). Although this film states that Thomas Duff and Co. owned 'nearly 5,000' mills/looms in 1923, this is possibly an exaggeration. D.R. Wallace, author of the first history of the jute industry, calculated that their total number of looms in 1927 was 3,360 (Wallace, 1928, 96-97).

The Titaghur mill was a leader in worker welfare: in 1923 it was alone in starting a scheme to provide medical welfare for women workers, focussing on midwifery, childcare, and hygiene (the Duff Co. had unsuccessfully tried to convince several other local mills to adopt the scheme) (Sen, 1999, 167). While this appears philanthropic (and probably was in part a response to general public concerns about welfare and health) it was also driven by expediency, particularly the attempt by the mills to postpone the Maternity Benefit Act (eventually passed in 1929) by arguing that they could voluntarily provide health benefits for female workers which would obviate the need for legislation (Sen, 1999, 163-76).

## Analysis

*Jute* has two main sections. The first explores the production of jute in Titaghur mill number two. The second, entitled 'The Indian Workman', outlines the employment conditions for workers at the factory.

These sections are constructed in different ways. The first of them is broken down into two parts. It opens with panoramic shots of the factory compound, followed by footage of barge repairs. Its second part follows one of the standard patterns of the industrial film: it covers the manufacturing process in detail and in chronological order. One of the aims of many industrial films was to demystify methods of production for an audience that was buying mass-manufactured goods (Peterson).

There are other aspects to this film's portrayal of the jute production process. It stresses the up-to-date techniques used at the factory. A title card indicates that the mill is 'worked on the most modern lines'. We are further informed that the mill is 'often visited by distinguished visitors to India', that 'The Engine Room of this Mill is recognised as one of the finest in India' and that the plant 'compares very favourably with any similar lay-out in the British Isles'.

These latter title cards indicate that the film was perhaps intended for a British audience. However, this stress upon the forward-thinking nature of Thomas Duff & Co. Ltd takes on a different light during the 'Indian Workman' section of the film. Here the title cards boast of 'Modern Sanitation' and 'Septic Tank Latrines'. They outline the difference between a 'Typical Indian Hut' compared with 'present day accommodation provided for workers'. This section of the film also features the workers' playground, the company's school and, in a staged scene, a white nurse instructing a group of Indian women about 'abnormal labour'. The section concludes with an ethnographical shot of 'A Happy family', in which an Indian woman holding her child faces the camera, eventually breaking into a broad smile.

The second section of the film can be seen as a response both to the threat of welfare legislation that would limit the flexibility of the workforce (sickness compensation was also an issue, hence, perhaps, the focus on sanitation) and to contemporary public concerns with welfare and conditions. This also explains the sequence showing new mothers taking their babies into the factories to attend to their 'modest needs': given the lack of acceptable childcare within the mills and the ambiguous nature of maternity and other employment rights this was of course a necessity rather than a luxury, but the film presents it as illustrative of a concern with family welfare.

Although *Jute* aims to show Thomas Duff & Co. Ltd in the most positive light, viewed today this intention is undermined by the film's structure and by its content. One of the film's title cards claims that 'The comfort and welfare of the Indian Workers employed at these Mills are the first consideration of the Company'. This is not necessarily borne out in the structure of the film itself: it is the workings of the factory's machinery and the processing of jute that are prioritised within the film's chronology; jute processing is in addition given the largest proportion of screen time (however, these are in part generic conventions).

The film is revealing in other ways: we see that the regime in the factory mirrors that of the British Raj. British rule in India was one in which the many were governed by the few: at the beginning of the twentieth century nearly 300 million Indian subjects were administered by fewer than 1,000, mostly British, members of the Indian Civil Service (Louis, 2001, 5-6). In this film we witness the 7,000 workers of the Titaghur company's mill being overseen by 15 male European staff, to whom 44 Indian clerical staff are subordinate. Further examples of the hierarchy of the company are in evidence. The European staff are given a matching uniform of white suits and pith helmets; their role appears to be the passive monitoring of the mill's engines and of the Indian staff. The Indian clerical staff have no set uniform; most are wearing dhoti, some have western-style jackets. The workers in the factory are in traditional Indian clothing. Their work and play contrasts strongly with the behaviour of European staff. We witness two workers cutting jute on an open steel blade; we also witness two, near naked, Indians in a wrestling match. There is also a clear separation between male and female workers in the factory. Furthermore, although the workers' homes are portrayed as an improvement on the typical Indian hut, they are also seen in close proximity to the mill; part of the compound that had been coolly surveyed by the camera at the film's beginning.

**Richard Osborne and Francis Gooding (May 2010)**

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## Titles

**KING OPENS EMPIRE EXHIBITION**

\* Series Title:

TOPICAL BUDGET

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1462>

## Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

\* Colour:

Black/White

\* Sound:

Silent

\* Footage:

397 ft

## Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

Great Britain

\* Production Company

Topical Film Company

**Synopsis**

[N.b. the dates in this original synopsis are incorrect: the events covered in the films are of the 1924 Exhibition, not the 1925 one]

ACTUALITY. An amalgamation of two events featuring the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. The opening of the exhibition by King George V (23/4/1925) [23/4/1924] and the royal visit with King Ferdinand and Queen Marie of Rumania (14/5/1925) [14/5/1924]. Main title. No series number. "Pictures Exclusive to 'Topical Budget'" (4). A Panorama presenting some of Wembley's Wonders" (8). Iris out to LS of the buildings at the British Empire Exhibition, Wembley, pan left (27). "Burma" (28). Iris out of Burma pavilion - still under construction (37). "Canada. (from the lake)" (39). Iris out to Canadian pavilion (49). "India. (from the lake)" (51). Iris out to LS of the India pavilion viewed across the ornamental lake (68). The Coronation coach passing down The Mall with crowd lined streets and Household Cavalry escort; King and Queen not visible (92). "As the King declared the Exhibition open all the flags are broken at the mast" (94). LS of the massed

choirs at one side of Wembley Stadium (99). GV of the stadium with marching band performing (118). View over the crowd as the King and Queen arrive in an open landau (145). "The Massed Choirs" (147). Return shot of choirs and crowds, now waving and cheering (153). Closer view of the royal procession as it progresses around the perimeter of the stadium, King George V and Queen Mary seen (183). "Garlands of Welcome at the Indian Pavilion" (185). LS down wide, long corridor of Queen Mary, Queen Marie of Rumania receiving garlands from a man and woman in Indian dress, King George and King Ferdinand are given similar garlands. The royal party walk to camera (214). "At Queen Victoria's Memorial" (216). Closer shot of the royal party as they pass through an indoor exhibition (235). "From India to Burma by Railodok Car" (239). View through dense crowds of royal party travelling in long, covered carriage (not horse-drawn) with driver (254). "At Burma:- Umbrella of State" (257). Pan down Burma pavilion (264). LS the royal party leaving the pavilion under the state umbrellas (274); closer view of the King leaving (281); Queen Mary and Queen Marie pass the camera under the umbrellas (290). "Their Majesties had to make their way through dense throngs " (295). Viewed from an elevated position the royal party make their way (with police escort) through the cheering crowd (312). "Crossing Old London Bridge" (314). LS Pan of entrance to the bridge - a long ramp with an arch between two towers, the royal party is not visible (325). "Leaving H.M. Government Buildings after Lunch" (319). ELS the royal party descends steps of building, cheered by crowd in foreground (350). "At Newfoundland" (352). Royal party leave the Newfoundland pavilion and walk along planks on the grass (372). "At Fiji" (373). Royal party leave another building (397ft). Note: (0-183ft) is from TOPICAL BUDGET 661-1 KING OPENS EXHIBITION; (183-397ft) is from TOPICAL BUDGET 664-2 MONARCHS' TOUR OF BRITISH EMPIRE.

### Context

The Empire Exhibition was conceived in 1913 by Lord Strathcona (Stevenson, 1925, 610). Put on hold due to the 1914-18 war, the project finally received parliamentary backing in 1920. Wembley was chosen as the location, principally because of its good rail links (MacKenzie, 1982, 107). The first event to take place at the Wembley site was the 1923 FA cup final, held at the newly built stadium. In the succeeding years there were two Empire Exhibitions.

The formal opening of the 1924 Exhibition took place on 23 April at Wembley Stadium. Here, the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VIII), who served as President for the Exhibition, addressed his father, King George V, and outlined the purpose of the event: 'I hope, Sir, the result of this Exhibition will be to impress vividly upon all the peoples of your Empire the advice that you have



given to them on more than one occasion, that they should be fully awake to their responsibilities as the heirs of so glorious a heritage; that they should be in no wise slothful stewards, but that they should work unitedly and energetically to develop the resources of the empire for the benefit of the British race, for the benefit of those other races which have accepted our guardianship over their destinies, and for the benefit of mankind generally' (Knight and Sabey, 1924, 12). As part of this drive, sixteen of the participating colonies and dominions were given a representative building in which to advertise their culture and their wares: for example, the Burmese pavilion was based on a temple in Mandalay; the Ceylonese pavilion was modelled on the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy; and Hong Kong by a street of Chinese ('British Empire Exhibitions 1924-1925'). The Prince declared that this display represented 'the whole Empire in little', and that the event provided an opportunity 'to take stock of the resources, actual and potential, of the Empire as a whole' (Knight and Sabey, 1924, 130).

This film is combined from two news reports, one centred on the attendance of King George and Queen Mary at the opening ceremony, while the other focuses on the visit of King Ferdinand and Queen Marie of Romania, who on 14 May 1924 accompanied a returning King George and Queen Mary to the exhibition. Marie was one of Queen Victoria's granddaughters; she is credited with enlisting Romania on the side of the Allies in World War I, and of enlarging her country's territory in the Treaty of Versailles (*The Times*, 15 May 1924, 15).

The films were made by the Topical Film Company, which was founded by William Cecil Jeapes and Herbert Holmes in 1911. They would originally have been seen as component items in editions of 'Topical Budget', the company's bi-weekly newsreel. During World War I the Topical Film Company came under the control of government, and in 1919 it was purchased by the newspaper proprietor Edward Hulton. 'Topical Budget' was one of the three major British newsreels in the silent era, and under Hulton's guidance it witnessed its greatest period of popularity, reaching a weekly audience of up to five million (McKernan, 'Topical Budget (1911-1931)').

### **Analysis**

Royal Topical Budget films and the Empire Exhibitions were similar in outlook. Luke McKernan has noted that the Royal Family were one of the most popular subjects of Hulton-era Topical Budget films, and that footage of their tours of Empire countries offered home audiences contrived representations of 'the extent of Britain's apparent power' (McKernan, 'Topical Budget: British Identity and Empire'). He notes that these films were always made with a British perspective in

mind, and that they ‘showed traditionalist Britain what it wanted to be shown of its Empire’ (McKernan, ‘Topical Budget: British Identity and Empire’). They thus chime with the Empire Exhibition itself, which offered an idealised representation of Britain’s colonies and dominions.

The presence of Royalty was prioritised at the Empire Exhibition, and it is also the focus of these Topical Budget films. In the footage of the opening ceremonies we can see the exterior of some of the pavilion buildings, but there is no clear sight of any of the people from the colonies. Moreover, just as the Exhibition arranged the countries of the Empire in order to show them in their best light, here we get the studied movements of the Royal party. Smither and Klaue note how ‘King George and Queen Mary quietly but deliberately oblige the cameras, knowing when to pause, when to move, always aware that they are on show to the millions’ (Smither and Klaue, 1996, 70). Indeed, this was a media event through and through. The opening ceremony was broadcast on the radio and was ‘heard by millions’; it was also issued for sale as a gramophone recording (Knight and Sabey, 1984, 115). It should also be noted that there was something inherently filmic about the Empire exhibition itself: its various displays operating like stage sets. John MacKenzie notes that it was ‘suggested that Wembley should become the British Hollywood’ (MacKenzie, 1984, 112).

The film of the Romanians’ visit offers a slightly different perspective from that of the opening ceremony. The royal couples are the centre of attention, but here they are filmed, predominantly in long shots, amongst the Wembley exhibits. We receive our first clear sights of colonial people: at the Indian Pavilion the High Commissioner Sir Dadiba Dalal and his wife can be seen as they garland the royal couples with flowers (*The Times*, 15 May 1924, 10). However, what is conveyed most strongly in this segment of the film is the popularity of the Exhibition and of the royal family – throughout there are thronging crowds.

The Empire Exhibitions presented a particular image of the Empire, one in which the colonies and dominions profited from manufacturing goods for export to the Metropolis, and one in which British aid was seen to be helping to transform life. In these films we do not see the interior of any of pavilions, but there is some sense of how the Exhibition put the Empire on display. The colonies are represented in a rationalised and modernised form: only the finest architecture is on show; we see the visitors pass easily between the countries on foot, and we also see them using the futuristic ‘rail-o-doc’ car to span the continents. Conversely, the bizarre juxtapositions, such as a Burmese pagoda next to the concrete Canadian pavilion, serve to highlight the extent and variety of Britain’s colonial lands. There is also an illustration of where the power lies in this relationship. We witness

the King traversing his 'Empire in little', and we also get to see the mock governmental buildings of the metropolis, which were a feature of the Exhibition.

MacKenzie quotes an eastern European visitor, Eric Pasold, who visited the exhibition and remarked on the 'endless variety of human types' on display. Pasold continues: 'yet all were members of one great empire, united under one king and flag, linked by the English language, financed by sterling, ruled by British justice and protected by the Royal Navy. How proud they must feel, I thought, and how I envied them' (MacKenzie, 1984, 112). Such a reaction was the aim of the Exhibition, and was also desired of these Topical Budget films.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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FILM TITLE:

**the LAND OF CYPRUS**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5737>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1950

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Central Office of Information

Colonial Office

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Anglo-Scottish Pictures

Film Surveys

SHORT SUMMARY:

"One of the greatest tasks facing many countries today is to give back to the land its lost fruitfulness" - a study of Cyprus is used to illustrate this problem.

FULL SUMMARY:

The film explains the depletion of the forests of Cyprus (by fire, tree-felling and the uncontrolled grazing of goats) and how this leads to the erosion of topsoil; it also points out other problems, such as water shortage, malarial mosquito etc. A government programme introduces agricultural research and training, and communal irrigation to replace traditional allocation of water rights. Contour ploughing and terrace farming, re-forestation following surveys, and the tethering of goats help retain the topsoil in the hills. The film goes on to explain the consequences, which give birth to a new set of problems: prosperity comes to certain villages, and internal migration from destitute villages begins; the same trend also leads to overcrowding of cities, exacerbated by improvements in medicine; the population increase is outpacing agricultural improvement - "Will they crop the island bare?" As a symbol of hope, the film shows schoolchildren planting trees in the hills, but can offer no final internal solution, and reminds us that the problem is not confined to Cyprus.

NOTES:

Documentation/associated material: COI file - shotlist, commentary, music cue sheet

REFERENCES:

shotsheet

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/N

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

925 ft

RUNNING TIME:

9 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTTILES:

None

### **Credits**

Writer and editing supervision: Arthur Calder-Marshall [National Archives file]

Commentator: James McKechnie [National Archives file]

### **Context**

*The Land of Cyprus* was made in 1950 by Anglo-Scottish Pictures for the British government's Central Office of Information. Anglo-Scottish Pictures was one of a number of firms who specialised in making documentary films, often for industrial sponsors, but also for government departments (Burton, 2005, 68). The writer Arthur Calder-Marshall was employed on the project 'in respect of research and preparation of treatment, shooting script, writing of commentary and editing supervision' (National Archives file: INF 6/79). The commentator for the film is the actor James McKechnie.

A document in the National Archives file relating to *The Land of Cyprus* reveals that UNESCO, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations 'encouraged the production of

this film'. The FAO also made suggestions for the commentary, including the script that is featured at the film's end. The proposal for *The Land of Cyprus*, which was originally titled *Soil Erosion in Cyprus*, is outlined in a letter from H.M.K Howson of the Colonial Office, written on 30 January 1950: 'a film should be made, by compilation from existing material, on soil erosion and conservation in Cyprus'. Among the sources used from film libraries were footage from *Cyprus is an Island* (1946), *Today and Tomorrow* (1936), as well as an unidentifiable film about mosquitoes and malaria. Howson also outlined the film's intended audience: 'the film is likely to appeal not only to non-theatrical audiences in this country but also to audiences in backward countries overseas, both inside and outside the Commonwealth'. Bearing this audience in mind, he instructed that its style of editing and commentary should be 'kept comparatively simple'. Among the countries that received this film were Holland, Greece, Brazil, Persia, Spain and Turkey. The film was also distributed in Britain as one of the Central Office of Information's free monthly releases (National Archives file: INF 6/79).

Despite the rising tide of independence among Empire countries, during the 1950s Britain was determined to hold on to Cyprus as a colony. According to George H Kelling, Cyprus's importance lay in providing Britain with a secure military base in the troubled middle-eastern area (Kelling, 2006, 190). The majority Greek-Cypriot population of the island was meanwhile approaching the United Nations with demands for *enosis* (union with Greece) (Hitchens, 1984, 36-38); in response to the Greek-Cypriots' action the Turkish-Cypriot population was beginning to look towards Turkey as potential rulers of the island (Kelling, 2006, 191). There was nevertheless no concrete political agitation until factions among the Greek-Cypriot population commenced guerrilla warfare against the British in April 1955 (Kelling, 2006, 187).

Despite these growing problems, the post-war period was one of growth and relative prosperity for Cyprus. The death rate fell from 19.7 per thousand in 1921 to 8.4 per thousand in 1946; literacy rates grew from 37.8% in 1931 to 53.8% in 1946; and a move away from a predominantly agrarian economy drew increasing numbers to the towns (Christophorous, 2006, 305-07). In addition, a new irrigation scheme, implemented from 1946 onwards, brought clean water to virtually the whole population (Brey, 2006, 441).

### **Analysis**

*The Land of Cyprus* is both a stereotypical and an unusual colonial film. On the one hand, it retains the orientation of its borrowed film materials, and tells a familiar tale of the British finding solutions

to colonial problems. On the other hand, *The Land of Cyprus* goes further than most colonial films, admitting that these solutions bring with them problems of their own. This is perhaps evidence of the influence that UNESCO and the United Nations had upon this film. The film is pulled between the orientation of its original title, *Soil Erosion in Cyprus*, and the more general problems indicated by its replacement title, in which the 'land' of Cyprus can be taken as referring to both the island as a whole and to its geological features.

The film begins by outlining problems that Cyprus is facing. These include deforestation; free-ranging goats; and the mis-management of water supplies. These topics are the specific concerns of the films that *The Land of Cyprus* is compiled from. Here, they are each re-emphasised to stress the subject of soil erosion. In addition, the documentary is careful to stress that the origins of these problems lie in ancient, pre-British times. There is a repeated refrain that each issue has existed 'for centuries', and a mention of King Solomon suggests a different era of colonial rule. At this point in the film the islanders are cast as being incapable of solving problems themselves: 'the people sat and waited in the shadows for what would happen next'.

This provides the cue for the first appearance of a British official on the screen: we see a young, white man from the Water Supply and Irrigation Department. The borrowed film materials convey a sense of collaboration between the British and the Cypriots. They also reveal a strict sense of hierarchy. The lone British official has the plan; the islanders are instructed and they carry out the heavy work. There is then a reversal of images that we have seen earlier in the film: wild waters are now shown to be controlled; fertile lands replace barren ones; the science of farming replaces the science of disease; a prosperous rural family replaces a poverty-stricken one; trees are shown flourishing; goats are tethered.

It is at this point that the film moves in its novel direction: outlining the problems that these solutions have brought. Although it would perhaps be expected that this orientation is due to the influence of UNESCO and the United Nations upon the film, it should be noted that these new problems have little to do with soil erosion. It is acknowledged that, despite improvements, population growth on the island is outpacing food supply. In addition, the staggered nature of the improvements is encouraging unwelcome population movement to particular villages and towns.

At first it seems as though the solution to these problems will lie in the emigration of the 'healthy', 'strong', and 'educated' youngsters abroad. This film was made in the post-war period when there

were labour shortages in Britain. It asks of the children, ‘will they, with their insistent hunger, crop the island bare?’ and ‘must they go abroad for a living?’ However, in contrast to its approach to the original issues, the film leaves this question open. The film ends with a sequence in which a schoolmaster instructs his class to head for the mountains, where they are shown planting young saplings. Rather than there being a colonial problem and a British solution, the Cypriot situation is now universalised. It is here that the Food and Agriculture Organisation had its most direct influence upon the film. Their script emerges on the screen, stating: ‘Too often man has not given proper care to the soil off which he lives. One of the greatest tasks facing many countries today is to give back to the land its lost fruitfulness. This story is a vital one, not only for Cyprus, but for the world’. These sentiments chime with the time in which the film was made: they speak of regeneration to a world that was still recovering from the War. And yet these remain surprising images and words to see in a governmental documentary about Cyprus: they send out a message of self-help and new beginnings, whereas the island itself remained under determined British control.

**Richard Osborne (April 2010)**

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## Titles

**LE THÉ**

\* TEE (Alternative)

\* TEEERNTE (Archive)

\* THÉ: CULTURE, RÉCOLTE, PRÉPARATION INDUSTRIELLE

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1165>

## Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

\* Colour:

Colour

\* Sound:

Silent

\* Footage:

510

## Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

France

\* Production Company

Path

**Synopsis**

INTEREST. The growing, collection and processing of tea in Ceylon. No main title. Tea bushes planted out by natives can we change the use of natives in the synopsis? To workers? under European supervision (70). LS of native collecting the leaves (113). CU of a woman picking tea leaves (137). Workers, carrying baskets file, past the camera (158). Putting the leaves into large baskets (198). Weighing the baskets (230). Inside the factory: drying the leaves and sifting (303). The tea is put into a steam drier (331). In a yard, women sort the tea for quality (341). The tea is packed into crates and weighed (368). Two Ceylonese men make tea. The tea is taken to two European women who drink it (428ft). Note: German titles. Note: Another copy is also held in MRS CARLISLE'S BABY REELS (296-326ft). Originally on 9.5mm the film has been transferred to 16mm. The film shows natives collecting leaves, carrying and weighing baskets, drying and sifting the leaves, factory scenes and the packing of the crates.

### Context

Born at a time of industrial expansion, cinema both reflected and reflected on new manufacturing processes. The industrial film was one of a number of different types of non-fiction film that proliferated during the early years of cinema. These films to some extent demystified methods of production for an audience that was buying mass-manufactured goods (Peterson). Adopting a template that had been established by magazines and newspaper articles devoted to scientific and technical information, the industrial film commonly explained manufacturing procedures in some detail and in chronological order. At the same time as many industrial films documented the changes that were taking place in the production of consumer durables, others explored new procedures in food production. The companies featured in the films were often those of their sponsors; however, this was not always the case. *Le Thé* features the products of Quaker Ceylon Tea. Although it is probable that this company had a hand in the film's production, it has not been possible to find supporting evidence. Industrial films differed from early advertising films; while the latter are obviously concerned with promoting products and often feature staged action, industrial films are devoted to realistically documenting production processes (Peterson).

*Le Thé* was produced in 1909 by the French company Pathé-Frères, the 'first acknowledged global empire in cinema history (Abel, 'Pathé-Frères', emphasis in original). Pathé's success rested on the mass production of films and on distributing their releases via a worldwide network (Abel, 1994, 22). By 1909 Pathé had established distribution agencies throughout Europe, in the US, and in the colonised countries of India, south-east Asia, central and southern America, and Africa (Abel, 1994, 23). One of the selling points of early Pathé films was the distinctive stencil colour technique employed for some of the releases. Colouring films was a repetitive process: originally, large numbers of female employees tinted each frame individually by hand. However, by 1907 Pathé had mechanised this procedure (Abel, 1994, 20, 34).

Although the first tea plantation in Ceylon was not developed until 1867, 600 square miles of the country were under cultivation by 1900. By this point the tea industry was responsible for more than half of the country's export earnings, with Britain being the primary market (Moxham, 2003, 183, 209; *The Romance of Tea*, 9). Tea production became mechanised following the introduction of the 'Sirocco' tea drier by Samuel C. Davidson in 1877 and John Walker & Co's tea-rolling machine in 1880. Correspondingly, Ceylon witnessed the construction of its first tea factory in 1884 ('History of Ceylon Tea').

Although a few of the tea estates in Ceylon were owned by Sinhalese or Indians, the vast majority were British-controlled, and by the early twentieth century production was increasingly undertaken by large companies (Moxham, 2003, 165-67). It also became the case that British men of 'good family' ventured to Ceylon to work as tea planters, bringing with them European ideas of etiquette and taste (Moxham, 2003, 169).

From the outset, plantations in Ceylon relied on imported labour. The Sinhalese regarded it as against their way of life to work for hire, and the tea planters relied primarily on Tamils from southern India (Moxham, 2003, 172). Indian Tamils eventually settled in large numbers: by 1900 they constituted 300,000 out of a total population of just under four million (Moxham, 2003, 183-84). The Tamils were made to pay for their transport to Ceylon and for their recruitment. This meant that they began their careers in debt; a debt that due to low wages and being paid in arrears was hard to repay (Moxham, 2003, 183). The workers were provided with 'extremely basic' accommodation, and were expected to work a ten-hour day with no break (Moxham, 2003, 180-81). While men undertook the heavier clearing work, women worked as tea clippers ('Just 64p a Day for Tea Clippers in Sri Lanka'). Children worked in the fields from the age of five, and earned about a third of the adult wage (Moxham, 2003, 182). In sum, Moxham argues that 'it was a tragedy that so many of the British planters showed so little compassion, and made so little effort to improve life for their labourers beyond what was strictly in their own interest' (Moxham, 2003, 183).

Although this film was titled *Tea Planting in Ceylon* for its release in Britain, and features the products of the Quaker Ceylon Tea, there is some doubt regarding the location of the tea gardens featured in the film. It is possible that they might be located in Malaya.

### **Analysis**

*Le Thé* follows the pattern of most industrial films by showing stages of production in chronological order. It commences with the planting of tea bushes, and then follows the cultivation of the crop, leading up to one of the standard climaxes of the genre: the moment of distribution. *Le Thé* then goes one stage further, showing the consumption of tea by European consumers. Throughout there is great attention to detail. The intertitles clarify each stage of the process, and the cameraman uses a range of shots – from extreme long shots through to medium close-ups – to best portray the activity. Moreover, the majority of shots are arranged, either by grouping people or through the judicious positioning of the camera.

The cinema journal *Bioscope* praised the film for the fact that its ‘nearer views’ are likely to be ‘fascinating to all consumers of our national beverage’, and also added that it makes a ‘striking picture’ (*Bioscope*, 5 August 1909, 19). *Le Thé* is one of Pathé’s colour-tinted films, and at times leans closer to the picturesque qualities of the travelogue than it does to the dispassionate elucidation of the industrial film. Several of the scenes are beautifully arranged, in particular an extreme long shot in which the hats of the tea clippers appear as dots as they work across a mountainside field. Much of the tinting has now faded, although there are still occasional flashes of the ‘vivid, flashing colours of the native costumes’, in what the *Bioscope* praised as the ‘one of the best coloured films we remember to have seen for some time’ (*Bioscope*, 5 August 1909, 19).

The *Bioscope* noted one further quality of the film: that it ‘gives an interesting sketch of Cingalese life’ (*Bioscope*, 5 August 1909, 19). As well as focussing on the manufacturing procedures, the cameraman documents the workers; for example, there is a prolonged individual portrait of a slightly careworn looking woman clipping tea. This medium close-up is made all the more striking due to the fact that it follows immediately on from the depersonalised extreme long shot of the dotted hats among the field. The Sinhalese life on display is almost entirely confined to the tea plantation. Here one of the most striking features is the dominating presence of the plantation’s overseers. In the film’s opening sequence a European supervisor commands the centre of the screen; he instructs the workers crouched before him how to plant bushes. Arranged behind him in the distance another white plantation officer walks amongst a group of men, monitoring them closely as they rake the land. Repeated throughout the film there are scenes in which the overseers instruct the workers how to do their jobs, and even in the extreme long shot a European’s pith helmet can be seen pursuing the coolie hats of the workers in the field. However, it should be noted that not all of the superiors are European: at several stages, in particular in the factory scenes, local workers occupy senior positions. It also the case that the close proximity of workers and superiors, and also some of the instruction that is taking place, appears to have been arranged for the camera.

The film’s final sequences provide a contrast to the rest of the film. Here there is a staged performance featuring two native domestic staff who prepare and deliver tea to two high-class European women. The scene provides a distinct contrast between the actions of the cameraman, who undertakes an intrusive ethnographic study of the workers, and the behaviour of the women, whose performance requires them to ignore the presence of these same staff. The women are instead deeply engrossed in conversation. One of the staff delivers their tea, and the women neither

pause nor acknowledge him. Nevertheless he still bows to them, and also to us, the tea-drinking audience.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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FILM TITLE:

**LIBERATION OF YENANGYAUNG**

[INDIAN ARMY OPERATIONS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA DURING THE SECOND  
WORLD WAR] [Allocated series]

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6370>

PRODUCTION DATE:

22/4/1945

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

India

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Public Relations Directorate, India

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Indian Public Relations Film Unit

SHORT SUMMARY:

Indian troops of 4th Battalion, 15th Punjab Regiment (33rd Brigade, 7th Indian Division) reoccupy the oil town of Yenangyaung, Burma.

FULL SUMMARY:

Indian troops on bare sloping ground waiting to advance. Troops advancing over sloping ground. Troops crossing frame from left to right. Men running before taking cover behind a low embankment; one of the men is a signaller carrying a wireless set on his back fitted with a very long antenna, two other men carry folded stretchers. View along the line of prone soldiers. Out of focus shot of a building some distance away. A smoke grenade explodes and the troops advance into the smoke. Troops entering low buildings on the outskirts of Yenangyaung; two of the soldiers pick up a small item from the ground (a loaf of bread?), hold it to their noses and then discard it. An officer looks at a charred object (burnt livestock?) with close-up. Two Indians surveying a site for a mortar battery. A good sequence of film showing an Indian mortar battery going into action. Wideshot of a river with smokescreen spreading. Two jeeps approaching camera. A group of Burmese civilians - who appear to be waiting for their cue - start clapping and cheering as the jeeps pull up. An Indian officer doles out cigarettes. A subedar gives out biscuits. An Indian soldier looks at a Japanese bank note. An Indian soldier buys vegetables from a Burmese woman. An Indian soldier, holding a large cheroot, talks with a Burmese civilian.

NOTES:

Yenangyaung had been a centre of the operations of the Burmah Oil Company. Its facilities were thoroughly sabotaged as the British retreated in 1942, and again as the Japanese retreated in 1945. It was taken by 33rd Brigade (7th Indian Division) between 20 and 22 April 1945. The troops seen in this film are identified on the dopesheet as a Punjab regiment, therefore 4th Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment.

#### REFERENCES:

Kirby, S Woodburn et al (1965) 'The War Against Japan Vol. IV' (London: HMSO)

#### PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Singh, B (Jemadar): cameraman.

#### ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

#### FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

35mm

#### NUMBER OF REELS:

1

#### LENGTH:

465 ft

#### RUNNING TIME:

6 mins

#### BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

#### SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

#### *Context*

The first reference to the oil industry in Yenangyaung, Burma is found in the writings of a Chinese traveller who visited the area in the thirteenth century (Hughes, 1949, 124). Control of the industry was in the hands of *twinzayos*, hereditary oil well owners. The British first became involved in the industry in 1886, when David Sime Cargill formed the Burmah Oil Company (Hughes, 1949, 124). The first machine-dug well was completed in 1888, and by 1908 a pipeline had been constructed between Yenangyaung and Rangoon (Hughes, 1949, 124).

Yengayaung's oil was of obvious strategic importance in World War II. As the Allied forces retreated from Burma in 1942 they chose to destroy the oil fields and refinery, rather than let them

fall into Japanese hands. Japanese access to oil was curtailed, with far-reaching consequences. Lord Ogmore claims that ‘it probably saved India and Ceylon from heavy bombing, it possibly safeguarded India from invasion, it almost certainly made possible the liberation of Burma in 1945’ (Ogmore, 1965, 30). Nevertheless, the Japanese did extract oil from the area, and Yenangyaung once again became a target during the Allies re-conquest of Burma in 1945.

The oil fields were vital to the maintenance of the Japanese army, whose generals were therefore determined to hold on to them (Kirby, 1965, 58). The Allies captured Yenangyaung by encircling the area. The first advances were made on 20 April 1945, and were met with artillery fire and the destruction of some of the oil holdings. The 4th Battalion, 15th Punjab Regiment, depicted in this film, backed up this initial advance (Kirby, 1965, 372). After two days of heavy fighting the Japanese retreated. The Punjab Regiment entered the town of Yenangyaung on the 21<sup>st</sup> and set about clearing the area.

Ashley Jackson has described Burma as being a ‘low-priority British colony until it became one of the Empire’s major battlegrounds in the Second World War’ (Jackson, 2006, 386). Despite being a part of the Empire since 1886, Burma had only recently come under direct British control, having been administered as a province of India until 1937. The early twentieth century had witnessed much anti-British sentiment in the country, and during the Japanese occupation many Burmese sided with their new rulers (Allen, 1984, 9; Jackson, 2006, 402). However, as the Japanese started to retreat, several of these Burmese factions switched their allegiance to the Allies (Jackson, 2006, 402-03).

This film is one of the products of the Indian Army’s Public Relations film Unit, based at Tollygunge, Calcutta (Gladstone). This training school was set up by Bryan Langley, who in the 1930s had been employed as a cameraman by British International Pictures, but in the war worked for the Army Film Unit (Ogidi). The footage taken by the unit would be used internally for Indian Army purposes. Some of the footage would also be edited into films that received a wider distribution, both in India and, via the Ministry of Information, abroad (for example, *Burma Victory* (1945) and *Johnny Gurkha* (1945)). Langley was responsible for training Indian soldiers as cameramen, and he later recalled his satisfaction in teaching ‘four or five of those lads’ who went on to film military operations in India and Burma (Langley, 1987). Among the cameramen working for Public Relations Directorate was Jemadar Balwant Singh, who filmed these rushes of the liberation of Yenangyaung.



### *Analysis*

Although the rushes that comprise this film are solely concerned with the liberation of Yenangyaung, it contains material that could be used for different purposes, and within this material there are clear differences of style in the way it is filmed.

There are two main elements to this film: footage of soldiers in the field, and footage of their reception when they arrive at Yenangyaung. The latter scenes could be used for propaganda purposes, as they aim to show the positive reception of liberating troops by Burmese townspeople. In their unedited form these shots disclose the degree to which they were orchestrated. Most telling is a grouping of about twelve locals who look directly at the cameraman, clearly awaiting their cue. Abruptly, when a jeep enters screen left they commence clapping. This is supposed to represent the first soldiers entering the town, but the fact that their arrival has been re-staged is made clear by the fact that cameraman is already amongst the townspeople. Also orchestrated are the establishing long-shots of the jeep's arrival, filmed from the locals' point-of-view.

The cameraman stages a reciprocal exchange of gifts. Further underlining the lack of spontaneity in the scene of the jeep's arrival, it appears that several of the locals had been equipped in readiness with gifts of flowers. Mirroring this sequence there is footage of another line of local people who, this time, are receiving gifts. One of the local girls receives hers twice. Its presentation is captured for a second time in medium close-up, disclosing her broad smile, which she makes to camera rather than to the soldier who has given her a biscuit. The Burmese in these scenes are not wholly 'on message'. Amongst those receiving gifts there are a number of youths who are wary of the camera and stare at it fixedly. Later encounters between the locals and the troops are also arranged for the camera. Individuals are carefully framed, and the cameraman gets a clear view of the action. However, there does appear to be more spontaneous interaction and enjoyment between the military and the local people in these scenes, as they joke with bank notes (possibly devalued Japanese currency), vegetable bulbs, and a large cigar/cheroot.

The footage of the battle for Yenangyaung also has its orchestrated components. Occasionally the cameraman films from exposed positions, which if the action were genuine would have put him in danger. For most of the time, however, the action is not staged. This footage presents a positive image of a self-contained Indian army unit advancing in battle, and provides a detailed record of their actions. However, even here the cameraman's narrative impulse is in evidence. Although no

Japanese are seen in this sequence, their proximity is cleverly indicated. In one sequence the Indian soldiers smell recently cooked food, which they discover in a house that the opposing troops have vacated.

One of the most notable features of this footage is the lack of distinguishing landmarks, notably any images of the oil wells. The footage of the troops' advance could be used for training purposes (in particular the detailed images of the mortar battery going into action), while the footage of their arrival in Yenangaung could be used generally as an illustration of the positive reception of Allied troops by Burmese people.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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**LORD WILLINGDON IN INDIA**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1730>

Title Ref: Sift 690735

Director:

Prod. Country: GB

Year: 1930

Prodn. Company:

Notes: Filmed between c1930-1935

Release Country: GB

Release date:

Format: 16mm

Run Time (Mins): 12

Length: 287 Feet 87 Metres

Colour Code: B

Colour System:

Sound System: SLNT

Language:

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

**Synopsis**

Personal film of Lord Willingdon, Viceroy of India from the early to mid-1930s.

Brief shot of moving steam train. Indian Maharajah in finery, horses led by servants with plumed headdresses. Indians in uniform followed by European officials in topees. One man is older (the Viceroy?) (24). The Viceroy inspects Indian troops. He leaves in a carriage with horse guards. Indian serviceman driving small cart. Pukka European woman cutting pineapple. View of fountain garden to hills beyond (60). Indian children by riverside. European men get into a boat. Viceroy and a lady come out of train and greet officials. Viceroy inspects more troops. Viceroy at station with servants and officials (100ft). European crowds at racecourse. Shot of betting board. Viceroy and his wife driven around the course in a horse and carriage. They dismount at the grandstand. Horses and riders come out of the enclosure. The race. Presentation of trophy. Viceroy and his wife get into carriage (149). Barog railway station. VIPs get on train; shots from moving train (165). Shot of train ('Esplanade via Alipore'). Buses - 4A Kalighat Baghbazaar

and No, 5 Kalishat-Howrah St. Ext. department store (?) 'Hall and Anderson Ltd'. Traffic policemen directing traffic (193). Zoo - elephants, ostrich, hippos (248). European men playing tennis doubles (262). Viceroy and his wife greeting guests and friends at the tennis match' leaving the group (281). 4 European children skipping in a ring around a post (288ft). [16mm]

### Context

Lord Willingdon's period as Viceroy of India, lasting from 1931 to 1936, is commonly viewed in contrast to that of his predecessor, Lord Irwin. Irwin had aimed to accommodate Indian political demands. His famous declaration of 1929 promised Dominion status for India, and he held a series of Round Table Conferences to discuss the sub-continent's future constitution. His gestures were nevertheless rejected by the Indian National Congress (INC), the leading Indian political party. Guided by Mahatma Gandhi, the INC instead launched a campaign of civil disobedience, which lasted from 1930 to 1934. In March 1931 Gandhi and Irwin forged an agreement: Congress agreed to attend the next Round Table Conference and to halt their campaign; the Government meanwhile agreed to withdraw the various Ordinances put in place to suppress the campaign, as well as to free imprisoned INC members.

Willingdon entered his period of office by increasing the number of Ordinances. Gandhi, who returned to a policy of non-co-operation in response to these measures, was imprisoned. This harsher climate was prompted by Gandhi's lack of commitment during the Round Table negotiations and by continued disturbances in India, exacerbated by the effects of economic depression. On the eve of Gandhi's arrest the Government issued a statement, arguing that 'It is particularly incumbent upon them at the present juncture to oppose with their full power a movement which would make constitutional advance impossible. It is their duty to hand over the new order a working administration, and to this end to resist, with all their might, forces which would create a state of anarchy and chaos' (Trench, 1934, 203).

The renewed civil disobedience campaign did not last long. It was thwarted, in part due to a lack of coherence, and in part due to the success of Willingdon's repressive measures. The Viceroy's partisan biographer, Victor Trench, claims that 'Within nine months of the struggle Government credit had risen so high that all the provincial heads, district and divisional officers and the Viceroy himself could evoke the most rousing receptions in their extensive tours for consolidating goodwill and co-operating force of the country' (Trench, 1934, 213-14). Willingdon had nevertheless received death threats during the campaign. Additionally, Judith Brown asserts that 'Sympathy for the *raj*

among potential Indian collaborators in consultation ebbed as a result of government's repressive measures against Congress and its incarceration of the Mahatma' (Brown, 1994, 283).

More fundamentally, Willingdon's policies could not halt the advance of nationalist politics in India. The Viceroy recognised this, and argued for a larger Indian presence in his Executive Council (Brown, 1994, 285). Coming at the close of Willingdon's period in office, the 1935 Government of India Act enshrined Irwin's promise of Dominion status for India. Despite unfulfilled demands for complete independence, the INC participated in the 1937 elections. It could be considered a success of Willingdon's period in office that the party was now committed to achieving its ends through parliamentary channels.

Willingdon had long experience in the sub-continent. Prior to being Viceroy he had served as Governor of both Bombay and Madras (on both occasions clashing with Gandhi). Among his achievements were the commissioning of the Lloyd's Barrage across the mouth of the Indus River; the establishment of the Willingdon airport in Delhi (now the Safdarjung Airport); and the creation of the multi-racial Willingdon Sports Club in Bombay, formed after he had been denied entry to the Royal Bombay Yacht Club when accompanied by Indian friends. Trench claims that the Viceroy was directly in touch with leading citizens of India and that it was his wish that 'formal ceremonies were cut down to the minimum' (1934, 214)

The home movies that comprise *Lord Willingdon in India* were shot between 1930 and 1935, roughly coinciding with Willingdon's term as Viceroy. The dates of each segment of footage are not easy to identify, not least because the scenes do not depict what are now considered to be the major events of Willingdon's period in office.

### *Analysis*

This film's value lies in the glimpses it provides of Lord Willingdon's daily life. It sheds light on his formal duties, excursions, and reveals a surprising aptitude for fun. The film also unwittingly discloses something of his relationship with Indians of different classes.

The Viceroy's recreational pleasures are primarily European. Willingdon was a favourite tennis partner of King George V, and in the film he can be seen mingling with the British players at a tennis club (who receive the assistance of Indian ball-boys). There are several scenes of English-styled gardens, and there is also footage of Calcutta's zoological gardens, where the exotic animals of

the Empire are housed in formal surroundings. It is the whimsical elements of this film that are least expected. There are humorous interludes, including shots of an Indian riding a carriage pulled by a small deer, a staged scene in which an Indian gent hams it up in a country garden, and the conclusion, which features European children whirling ever faster around a wooden post.

These scenes provide a contrast with the formal duties of the Viceroy, activities that Trench claimed were kept to a minimum. The film commences with a procession of dignitaries, both British and Indian. This is followed by scenes of an inspection of Indian troops; an outing in Willingdon's elegant horse-drawn carriage; and a later scene in which Willingdon's entourage parades around the course of a racetrack. Elsewhere there are scenes of his party boarding and disembarking from trains. Each time there is much hand-shaking as the Viceroy divides his time between prominent locals, be they formally dressed British or splendidly attired Indian princes. A third party, who is largely concerned with keeping the focus upon Lord Willingdon, films these scenes. In most of the shots Willingdon is kept in the centre of the frame and the camera often pans to follow his movements. However, these sequences are always shot from a solitary camera and this is commonly positioned to film long shots, thus much of the surrounding activity of officialdom is captured in the frame.

Travel forms a major subject of the film. Willingdon can be seen journeying by carriage, boat and train, and there are street scenes in which the focus is on the movement of buses, carts and cars. Most interesting is the footage shot from vehicles in motion. Alex Davidson describes these scenes filmed by members of Willingdon's party as 'exhilarating' (Davidson), and there is certainly a greater sense of excitement in this footage of India rushing by than there is in the third-party recordings of the Viceroy's official duties. In addition, it is largely in these segments of film that we get to see 'ordinary' Indians. The Viceroy's films capture them at work and at play, but always from the distance of a moving car or train. A similar sense of separation is conveyed in one of the scenes of Willingdon's carriage processions. In this example the camera is not panned to follow the movement of the carriage. Local Indians can be witnessed, but only once the party has moved off and exited the frame.

Richard Osborne (October 2009)

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Davidson, Alex, *Lord Willingdon in India*, Mediatheque, BFI, London.

Trench, Victor, *Lord Willingdon in India* (Bombay: Samuel A. Ezekiel, 1934).

*Titles***MAHATMA GANDHI NOA KHALI MARCH**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/635>

## Technical Data

## \* Year:

1947 (circa)

## \* Film Gauge (Format):

16mm Film

## \* Colour:

Black/White

## \* Sound:

Silent

## Production Credits

## \* Production Countries:

India

## \* Camera Operator

GANDHI, Kanu

**Synopsis**

Speaks to a large crowd, possibly outside a railway station. Gandhi and entourage walking along in wooded surroundings. They cross a bridge and enter a village where they are greeted by people and a 'Triumphal Arch' made for his arrival. Gandhi outside his portable, personal bamboo hut. Gandhi and entourage walking along a forest trail. Gandhi on board ship; various shots of paddlesteamer - possibly crossing the Ganges. Shots of crowds awaiting his arrival. Moving out of Kushtia train station. Gandhi speaks to the crowd from a tent. The march again - Gandhi and entourage walk along amid water courses. Gandhi is flanked by Mann Gandhi, his grand-daughter, and Pyarelal Nayar. Gandhi at a table distributing fruit to children. Various shots of Gandhi and his entourage at different stages of their march. Pan of village. Marwari Relief Society vehicle. The entourage cross a bridge in a village and walk along a track. At a Red Cross camp/hospital. Gandhi talks to people. Gandhi seated talks to a crowd. Nirmal Kumar Bose, Gandhi's temporary secretary, is seated next to him. Gandhi sitting with villagers dancing around him. Gandhi spinning. More shots of walking and entering villages. Gandhi flanked by Sushila Nayar, his doctor. More march scenes. A crowd dances in front of Gandhi's hut with a man beating a drum. Gandhi walking from the doorway. The entourage on the road again, carrying of Congress flags much in evidence. Shots of a paddlesteamer.



Harvesting coconuts, man climbing a palm, shots of oxen treading grain. A village destroyed in rioting; smashed pots; razed buildings; and villagers in their half-destroyed homes. Gandhi and party near water; a boat with bamboo covering. Gandhi gets out of the boat with Abba Gandhi (wife of his grand-nephew) and Pyarelal Nayar. Gandhi gets into boat and is poled along. He is helped out and gets into a car which drives off. Gandhi and entourage walking along. Gandhi getting out of boat, followed by a Congress politician. Scene in damaged villages. Gandhi being carried in a kind of sedan chair by two men. Gandhi flanked by Sushila Nayar and Abba Gandhi, with Congress politicians in the background. Gandhi gets back into the boat. Shots of damaged Hindu temples and figurines. Devasted villages; Nehru flanked by people from Gandhi's entourage, gives a garland of roses to a child, then walks along. Shots of man irrigating field.

### *Context*

By 1946 it was generally understood that India would gain independence from Britain. The pace and scale of change had yet to be determined, however. Although the Lahore Resolution of 1940 had posited the idea of a separate state of Pakistan, partition was not a certainty (Brown, 1994, 332).

Political parties were nevertheless becoming increasingly divided along religious lines.

Foreshadowing the troubles that accompanied partition, communal violence erupted in several areas.

In Calcutta, following a day of 'direct action' by the Muslim League, around 4,000 people, the majority of whom were Muslims, were killed (Brown, 2001, 337). In October the troubles spread to the Noakhali and Tippera districts of East Bengal. Here the dominant Muslim population victimised Hindus. The Bengal government estimated that there were 218 casualties, although it is believed that some families failed to disclose killings out of fear (Fischer, 1951, 483). In addition, over 10,000 homes were looted; Hindu idols were smashed and temples desecrated; and 'thousands' of Hindu women were forced to marry Muslims against their will (Fischer, 1951, 483).

In November 1946 Mahatma Gandhi headed for Bengal. No longer aligned with a political party, and opposed to partition, Gandhi sought to restore relations between Muslims and Hindus. He further stated that he was answering to the 'cry of outraged womanhood' (Fischer, 1951, 479). An itinerary was developed, whereby Gandhi visited a village a day, asking to be housed overnight by Muslim or Hindu residents. Now 77, Gandhi walked barefoot, and sometimes struggled to mount the tall bridges of the area (Fisher, 1951, 482). He spent much of his time with Hindu women and with the sick children of the villages (Gandhi, 2007, 556). Both Hindus and Muslims attended his prayer meetings, and it has been argued that during his stay 'Relations had improved perceptibly' (Fischer, 1951, 489). Gandhi had however been challenged over why he was not working in Bihar,

where more widespread violence had broken out, this time with Muslims being the principal victims (Gandhi, 2007, 559). In March 1947 he left Bengal for this province.

Gandhi's great nephew, Kanu, took this footage of the Bengal visit. Having privileged access, Kanu took many of the most famous stills photographs of Gandhi, several of which were used as source material for Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982) (Kalathil). Gandhi allowed himself to be photographed by Kanu on the grounds that a flash camera would not be used and he would never pose (Kalathil).

A sizeable party accompanied Gandhi during his stay in Bengal, but he made a specific request for the company of his 19-year-old grandniece, Manu. In Bengal she agreed to his practice of *brahmacharya*, whereby the two of them slept together, sometimes naked, to test their vows of chastity (Gandhi, 2007, 548-55). Several of Gandhi's followers questioned this practice, among them Kanu, whose 16-year-old wife Abha had been a reluctant participant in similar tests (Kamath, 2007, 107).

### *Analysis*

Kanu Gandhi is adept at capturing some of the main elements of his great uncle's visit to Bengal. He sets the scene by filming the excursion to the province – recording the trains and paddle steamers that took Gandhi there; capturing their approach; and filming while in motion on these vehicles. He also films the large crowds that greeted Gandhi during his journey, and there is footage of some of the speeches that he made to them. Also documented is the devastation in Bengal. Kanu films some of the desecrated idols and one of the looted villages. The majority of the film is taken up with Gandhi's marches from village to village, however. Here Kanu captures the physical exertion; Gandhi's reception; and also the homesteads in which he was put up overnight. Much of this footage is well framed: some sequences are filmed using water as a backdrop, others are shot through forest trees.

Kanu is skilled at working within his limitations. The footage is silent and so the substance of Gandhi's speeches is lost. Kanu instead focuses upon their impact, regularly panning across the crowds, capturing both their size and their response. Gandhi does not pose for the camera, and Kanu regularly has to film from a distance. Nevertheless, Gandhi still has an iconic presence in this film. Some of this is due to Kanu's filmmaking. He assumes good vantage points: during the village marches Kanu is usually ahead of the action, allowing Gandhi to progress towards the camera.

When he is allowed closer to Gandhi, he captures valuable detail: he twice takes the opportunity to film his bare feet, before panning up to reveal the rest of him. The bare feet are just one part of Gandhi's immediately recognisable image: his clothing; his cane; his glasses – all help to make him stand out no matter how large the crowd or from how great a distance he is filmed.

The footage is apparently unedited, and as such reveals some interesting recurrences. The first is related to the film's own bias: it concentrates most fully upon the stages of Gandhi's march and not upon the effects of the communal troubles. Although Gandhi's visit does not appear to have been orchestrated for media purposes, this film is centred upon his actions. When not panning to reveal the scale of the attendant crowds, it is Gandhi who is kept centre screen. There is little extraneous material (it comes as a surprise when the film includes footage of coconut harvesting and oxen treading grain). Furthermore, it is the footage of Gandhi that is most thoughtfully composed: the film of the looted village suffers from unsteady and out-of-focus camerawork.

There are recurrences within the footage itself. A strong female presence becomes apparent. Firstly, there are Gandhi's women helpers: during the marches he is always flanked by Abhu and/or Manu Gandhi. At certain times he can appear quite frail and he leans on them for support. Secondly, there are the women who greet him during the walk. Here he receives almost divine supplication: the women bow down before him; or garland him; or throw confetti-like substances. Also regularly recurring are the physical markers that punctuate the walk. There is a series of decorated arches, which Gandhi passes through before entering the villages. There is also a recurrence of bridges. Gandhi is seen making his unsteady way over at least ten of these. Kanu appears to want to capture the physical effort that Gandhi was expending on behalf of others. Finally, there is the recurrence of Indian National Congress flags. Although Gandhi had asked for them not to be carried, they are on prominent display during some of the stages of the walk; as such they serve as indicator that party politics were becoming unavoidable (Gandhi, 2007, 557).

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

#### *Works Cited*

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<b>Film Number</b>	CCE 203
<b>Film Title</b>	<b>MALTA GC</b>
<b>Web Address</b>	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5732">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5732</a>
<b>Production Date</b>	1/1943
<b>Production Country</b>	GB
<b>Production Sponsor</b>	Ministry of Information
<b>Production Company</b>	Army Film Unit RAF Film Unit Crown Film Unit
<b>Production Credits</b>	Bax, Arnold: music composer
<b>Production Cast</b>	Olivier, Laurence: narrator
<b>Film/Video Format</b>	P 1/35/A
<b>Number of Reels</b>	2
<b>Length</b>	1816 ft
<b>Running Time</b>	20 mins
<b>Black &amp; White/Colour</b>	B&W
<b>Silent/Sound</b>	comopt
<b>Language of Soundtrack</b>	English

**Language of Main Titles** English

**Language of Subtitles** None

**Context Date** 1941=1944

**Index: Objects**

- aircraft, British naval - combat: Fairey Albacore
- aircraft, German - combat: Junkers Ju 87
- combat, Allied - air raid
- destruction, Maltese military - area: bomb
- journalism and record, Maltese - press: Times of Malta
- society, Maltese - domestic
- society, Maltese - history
- weapons, British - gun [AA]: 3.7-inch
- weapons, British - gun [AA]: Bofors

**Index: Places** Malta & Valletta

**Previous Reference** RMY 74

## Notes

The sequence showing Wellington bombers leaving Malta on a night raid is very dark and outlines of the aircraft are barely visible.

Further details:

IMDb lists the directors as Eugeniusz Cekalski and Derrick De Marney.

*British Official Films in the Second World War* (Thorpe, Pronay, Coultass), lists the producer as Ian Dalrymple and the associate producer as John Monck.

BFI website lists the producer as John Monck.

AWM website has Ian Dalrymple as producer and A. Best as editor

*Independent* obituary has Richard Best as the editor.

## Synopsis

Film about the Axis air offensive against Malta.

The British supply effort, upon which the island is dependent, is rendered difficult by the great

distance of the island from British bases and its closeness to Italian airfields. Strategic importance of Malta. History of Malta. Peaceful disposition of the populace. German air raids. Tonnage of bombs dropped on the island. German losses of aircraft and pilots. The population of Valletta is seen emerging from shelters to survey the damage inflicted by Malta's 1774th air raid. In the devastation the Maltese have found a new unity – communal food storage and distribution, defence work. Offensive operations – anti-shipping strikes by torpedo aircraft prevented Rommel from being fully reinforced. Malta can claim her full share of the victory in North Africa. *Times of Malta* newspaper. Award of the George Cross as a tribute from the people of England. Nearly 3000 raids have failed to subdue the Maltese but their suffering calls for recompense and Malta-based Wellingtons take the offensive. From Malta's suffering will come eventual victory 'such is the will to freedom'. Film features good footage of air raids, bomb damage to hospitals, churches, etc and crashed German aircraft.

### Context

Situated centrally within the Mediterranean, Malta had long proved tempting to Empire builders. Sicilians, Phoenicians, Romans and Fatimids had all conquered the island before the British assumed control in 1814. For the British the island provided an ideal shipping stop halfway between Gibraltar and the Suez Canal.

During World War II Malta was in a pivotal position. It provided a staging post on the way to the Royal Navy's main fleet base in Alexandria. It also stood on the supply route between Italy and her forces in Libya. There was nevertheless debate in Britain about the value of defending the island (Barnet, 1991, 212). Moreover, it has been argued that the efforts to keep the island supplied outweighed any advantages that came from using it as an attack base (Grove, 2002 and Barnet 1991, 491-92, 525-26). Winston Churchill was prominent among those who argued that Malta should be a part of the war effort (Barnet, 1991, 212). The consequences for the island were profound. Between June 1940 and December 1942 Malta suffered 'the longest siege in British history' as it was subject to over 3000 bombing raids (Holland, 2003, 407).

On 15 April 1942 King George VI awarded Malta the George Cross – the 'G.C.' of this film's title – in recognition of the islanders' 'heroism and devotion' (*The Times*, 17 April 1942, 4). The George Cross is Britain's highest civilian award for gallantry and this was the first time that it had been given collectively. The gesture redoubled the need to defend the island. Grove argued that 'Having been awarded the George Cross as a propaganda gesture, the island of Malta could not be allowed to fall

as Singapore had done' (Grove, 2002). In Churchill's words, 'We are absolutely bound to save Malta in one way or another' (Barnet, 1991, 492).

Befitting the island's regal endorsement *Malta G.C.* was a prestigious documentary release. It was produced by the Crown Film Unit, in cooperation with the film units of the RAF and Army. The film received full-page advertising in *The Cinema* and it was accorded both a theatrical and a non-theatrical release, receiving its premiere on 24 January 1943 at the Gaumont, Haymarket. Star billing went to Laurence Olivier, who provided the commentary, and Arnold Bax, Master of the King's Musick, who composed the score. While the film is only a footnote in Olivier's career, it was the first film score that Bax had composed, and it received much commendation. Hubert Clifford claimed that the music was of 'the highest distinction' (Clifford, 1944, 15) and Ernest Irving stated that the score provided an 'excellent fit, giving that noble theme the illustration it requires' (Irving, 1949/1950, 40). The music also had a life of its own, being performed in concert separately from the film.

The film was distributed widely in Europe, including France, Belgium and Italy (*Hansard*, 17 January 1945). In Malta itself it was 'received with great enthusiasm with many queuing for hours to see it' (Wirtartna, 2009). According to a review of the film on the Malta Heritage Trust website the film was the only professional documentary about the war in Malta and was made 'on the specific wish of His Majesty King George VI'. The review further claims that the film 'was shown all over the free world giving Malta its new name as "Malta G.C."' (Wirtartna, 2009).

### Analysis

George VI's award for Malta was accompanied by a telegram, which stated that 'To honour her brave people I award the George Cross to the island fortress of Malta' (*The Times*, 17 April 1942, 4). A tendency to collectivise the islanders and to represent them by means of the island itself is also evident in *Malta G.C.* In telling the story of 'this little, brave George Cross island in the Mediterranean' the film focuses on the damage that has been wrought on Malta's landscapes and townscapes. When it talks of '*her* triumphant survival' it is the island that is being referred to. During one of the many scenes of bomb damage the commentary states that the 'piled rubble bears the symbol of her [Malta's] stubborn courage'.

The camera does not dwell on the islanders as it does on the devastation; for the most part they have a background role. They are depicted as being 'an old and proud people' and also a 'people of

old traditions and simple manners'. We see the donkey-drawn carts that the farmers use, and we witness the islanders' prayers and genuflections during a bombing raid. There is a brief summary of the island's past: 'Here came Carthaginians, Romans, Greeks and Vandals', but the film makes little mention of the reasons for British rule, merely stating that Malta has 'always looked to the outside world for most of her necessities'.

War activities are pictured in greater detail. There is extensive footage of supply ships, an enemy attack, and an Allied bombing raid. Although one reviewer commended the film's 'expressive photography and good continuity' (*The Cinema*, 20 January 1943, 15) it is sometimes apparent that the military scenes are edited together from footage shot by different film units. Moreover, it is the variance in picture quality and lighting sources that gives this away. Some elements are staged, for example the shots of locals pointing and looking up into a clear sky, which is spliced with grainy footage of aircraft flying overhead. Similarly, the revelation of the award of the George Cross in the *Malta Times* is a sequence filmed retrospectively and performed for the camera. The narrative highlights real footage of military combat - 'These scenes of Wellington bombers [...] were taken when the storm was at its height' - and unsurprisingly is the worst quality film on display.

These war activities are situated both geographically and historically. At the beginning of the film there is good use of maps, outlining Malta's strategic position in the Mediterranean and illustrating the position of the enemy's forces. The film is structured chronologically. After the description of Malta's military importance, the film flashes back to the pre-war life of the island. It then alternates between scenes of the latest air raids and an account of the islanders' progress throughout the war.

The film received largely positive reviews. *The Cinema* was the most effusive, both in its praise for the documentary and in valuing its usefulness: '*Malta, G.C.*, must eventually be shown throughout the world, but meanwhile it demonstrates the glory of the British Empire in a fashion to thrill even the critical, while its propaganda value is immeasurable' (*The Cinema*, 20 January 1943, 15). The *Documentary News Letter* was more downbeat, stating that 'Malta obviously deserved a "we can take it" film if ever a place did', but adding that 'It is probably nobody's fault if this kind of tribute seems nowadays to be a bit dated' (*DNL*, January 1943, 170). The *Kinematograph Weekly* praised the 'carefully phrased commentary, smoothly delivered by Laurence Olivier' (*KW*, 4 February 1943, 25). To modern ears, however, Olivier can occasionally sound strident and overly dramatic. Nevertheless, although this narrative is at times triumphant - 'This has been her life! This has been her history! This is her glory!' - it is rarely overbearing. In fact, in many scenes it refrains from direct comment,



allowing the images to speak for themselves. There is no detailing of the complications of defending the island, and the British resources that have been put into this operation are, if anything, downplayed. Instead, there is what one reviewer described as the film's 'religious overtone' (*DNL*, January 1943, 170). Malta is 'the island of St. Paul' and has stood firm 'against the infidel', her suffering is helping to atone for the sins of the world: 'she stood that freedom might survive.'

**Richard Osborne (May 2009)**

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MGH 6184

FILM NUMBER

FILM TITLE:

**MANDALAY - RANGOON**

[COLONEL HODGKINSON AMATEUR FILM] [Series]

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3311>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1947

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

SHORT SUMMARY:

Scenes of post-war Burma. The funeral procession is most likely that of Bogyoke Aung San (leader of the AFPFL - Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League - prior to Burma's independence in 1948) and several Executive Council members, assassinated 19 July 1947 in Rangoon.

FULL SUMMARY:

Close-up of a Burmese man writing in a small note pad with a fountain pen, holding a cigar in the other hand. Burmese women handing out food from trays to passers-by in the street. The funeral procession of Aung San and six Executive Council members. Cars parked in a line. Women wearing black armbands and carrying parasols. Scenes of the funeral procession and the coffins covered in flowers on wooden carriages. Buddhist monks form part of the procession. A jeep covered with a Red Cross flag and Burmese script. Buddhist monks and women hand out water in small bowls to the people in the procession. Jockeys in their silks and several British men also in the procession. Men carrying large floral wreaths. A blackboard with a notice in Burmese script. A small boy and more Buddhist monks hand out water in small bowls. A group of Indians in the procession. More water is handed out. Further shots of one of the coffins and the procession heading off into the distance. A handpainted intertitle - "Sun Rise".

A Burmese man jumps off a ship, joins two others in the water, one of which has the ship's rope. They swim ashore and one secures the rope. Two men on the ship secure the rope. A sign (on the ship?) reads 'Sale' (a town on the banks of the Irrawaddy). Scenes of sacks lined up on the riverbank. Close-up of the sacks being stitched closed. General shots of people on the riverbank, some with large baskets. The Burmese men take the ship's rope ashore and secure it. Women selecting vegetables? A small child in a chair, an older woman prompts the child to look at the camera (reversed). People disembarking from a small boat to a larger one. A man winds an oil drill? Close-

up of the drill-bit? Shots looking up a shaft. Scenes looking out over the river. Gulls, some slow-motion. Close-up on the name of a boat, 'Panhlaing'. Boats on the river, the wake of a boat, another shot of a gull.

A boat coming into Rangoon harbour, a barge behind it. Brief shot of Panhlaing. A close-up of the number 200, two men on the quayside seen from an incoming boat. Several men working a capstan to raise the boat's anchor. Scenes around the harbour. A sign on a roof reads 'Steel Brothers & Co Ltd Incorporated in England' Barges heavily laden with sacks are rowed across the water. Close-up of a red flag with a white spot. More scenes of the harbour including traditional (banana shaped) Burmese boats. A (teak?) logging plant on the river (reversed). Logs are lifted by cranes. Another is dragged onto the floor and sprayed with water. Close-up of waste water? coming out of a pipe. Several Burmese men guide a log being lowered. A British man inspects the teeth of a huge saw. The saw is shown in operation, cutting logs into planks. Chippings and off-cuts are carried in baskets to the furnace. The letters ABR are stencilled onto a piece of wood. Blocks of wood are stacked. Shots of the Shwedagon Pagoda and a chinthe. Woman carrying a baby. Women and children in the street. Buddhist monks, women (some wearing thanaka make-up) and children leaving the temple, putting their shoes back on. "The End O.H.M.S." Title shows an illustration of two chinthes, a peacock and an outline map of India and Burma.

#### NOTES:

Allocated Title taken from Hodgkinson's original can markings.

Stock date on Kodachrome is 1942

Technical: marked "Original"

Some scenes also on MGH 6197 and MGH 6203 (some reversed)

This film probably formed part of "The Changing East" programme of feature films which Hodgkinson made, presented and narrated at venues around Britain. See printed programme in Acquisition File.

#### PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Hodgkinson, Frank Outram (Lieutenant-Colonel): cameraman

#### ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

#### FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/16/A

#### NUMBER OF REELS:

1

**RUNNING TIME:**

10 mins 48 secs ca

**BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:**

Colour

**SILENT / SOUND:**

Silent

**Context**

Louis Allen has argued that Britain's main interest in Burma was 'mercantile' and that the main profits from developing the country's resources in oil, timber and minerals went to the British, Chinese and Indians, rather than to the Burmese themselves (Allen, 1984, 12-13). It is his belief that, as a result, it was 'hardly surprising' that there was a strong nationalist movement in Burma prior to the Second World War (Allen, 1984, 13).

During the War Burma was fought over twice: first, during 1942, as Allied forces retreated in the face of the Japanese advance; then in 1944-45 when the Allies forced the Japanese from the country. Many Burmese nationalists initially sided with the Japanese during their occupation, and in August 1943 the Japanese allowed the Burmese to form an 'independent' government, which declared itself at war with the Allies. However, by the latter stages of the War some nationalists had transferred their allegiance to the Allied forces, among them Aung San, who had been serving as Minister of Defence in the new Burmese government. In March 1945, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, head of the Allies' South East Asia Command, met with Aung San and decided that his support should be endorsed by the British, believing that it was wise to work with the people who were likely to become 'national heroes' following the War (Allen, 1984, 583).

Aung San's Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League party was strongly represented in the civil government that was restored after the War. In January 1947 he secured an agreement from the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee that Burma would achieve full independence within a year (Allen, 1984, 589). There was, however, discord with various Burmese political factions. On 19 July 1947 members of the Burmese Communist Party attacked a cabinet meeting, killing seven members of the AFPFL, including Aung San. On 4 January 1948 the Independent Union of Burma came into being, led by Aung San's successor U Nu; almost immediately Burma was plunged into civil war, the main protagonists being Communist insurrectionists and members of the Karen ethnic group who were campaigning for their own separate state (Stockwell, 2001, 484). The funeral march of Aung

San and the other AFPFL members was not held until 11 April 1948. More than half a million witnessed the procession in Rangoon when the leaders' coffins were transferred to a specially created mausoleum (Oung, 1996, 47).

The footage seen in *Mandalay-Rangoon* was shot by Lieutenant Colonel Frank Outram Hodgkinson in 1947 and 1948. It probably formed part of his 'Changing East' programme of films, which he presented during the late 1940s and early 1950s. The pamphlet produced to accompany these screenings describes Hodgkinson as a 'British film producer and writer' who 'knows the East from long years of residence and professional film making'. It states that 'During the war he commanded a British Film Unit under Lord Louis Mountbatten', indicating that he was in charge of the British section of the Anglo-US film unit that formed part of Mountbatten's South East Asia Command (SEAC). *Mandalay-Rangoon* and 'The Changing East' are not composed of film shot for official military purposes, but instead compiled from Hodgkinson's own amateur colour films.

'The Changing East' was toured throughout Britain: the pamphlet boasts of screenings at professional venues ('The Reardon Hall was packed to capacity'), factories ('over 3,000 workers from Armstrong-Vickers' attended'), the House of Commons, and finally 'a Command Performance at Buckingham Palace'. Hodgkinson edited his footage into three 'feature length' films, covering 'Burma and Siam', 'India', and 'Kashmir', which he would accompany with his own 'viva voce commentary'. Each film showed different aspects of 'The Changing East'. The Burma section was structured chronologically, beginning with the country as it was before the war – 'peaceful, happy and gay' – and culminating with the 'victory parades and tribal dances' that followed the Allies' victory. Hodgkinson's message regarding Burma was that, here, 'The Changing East spells anxiety'. The pamphlet describes 'two bitter invasions' and a country in 'constant fear from armed rebels and Communism'.

### **Analysis**

There are two principal reasons why *Mandalay-Rangoon* should be valued. The first is because it captures important historical footage; the second is because this footage is in colour.

The film opens with shots of a funeral procession. Although it has not been confirmed that this is actually that of Aung San and the other murdered cabinet members, the scale of the events would seem to confirm that this is the case. There are thousands present, and the procession is an elaborate

and prestigious affair: monks and serving ladies are on hand to distribute food and water to the crowds; we see a row of expensive cars which have conveyed attendees to the funeral; European and Indian guests are in attendance. Some of the events Hodgkinson captures correspond with reports of the final funeral march. He films members of the police and the regular army, who were enlisted to keep order, and it is also made obvious that more than one person is being laid to rest: several coffins can be seen (see Oung, 1996, 47-48).

If the funeral represents the 'Rangoon' section of this film, then the designation of the remaining footage as 'Mandalay' is confusing. Rather than depicting Burma's second-largest city, this footage instead begins by focussing upon industrial activities taking place in the Burmese countryside, before returning to Rangoon, where we see more workplaces. In both the city and the countryside Burmese workers can be seen undertaking some of the trades whose profits were predominantly diverted away from them. Hodgkinson films a timber yard, what appears to be an oil rig, and also the buildings of 'Steel Brothers & Co Ltd Incorporated in England'.

In the black and white footage of reoccupied Burma that can be seen in SEAC films such as *Feeding the Poor in Rangoon* (1945) the country looks drab and damaged after the years of fighting. *Mandalay-Rangoon* presents a more diverse picture: while there is evidence of the War (we see soldiers during the funeral parade), the film is also vibrant: colour is everywhere and it attracts Hodgkinson's eye. He captures the dynamic range of shades in the clothes of the people who attend the funeral, including Buddhist monks dressed in orange robes, elegant women in bright pinks, greens and purples, and (unexpectedly) jockeys dressed in their colours; he also concentrates on the display provided by floral wreaths at the funeral; elsewhere he is drawn to the rust-coloured trees of the Burmese countryside and to white gulls, which he films against a dark blue sky.

It would be interesting to know how the footage contained in *Mandalay-Rangoon* was represented in 'The Changing East' (the Imperial War Museum holds a copy of the latter half of the Burmese section of 'The Changing East', which culminates with some of the industrial scenes that are on display here. It is not clear if the scenes of the funeral were included in the first half, which the Museum does not hold). Although Hodgkinson wished to convey 'a sense of anxiety' in his portrayal of contemporary Burma, this is not what comes across most strongly in these sequences. In fact, a different description that is included in the pamphlet is more appropriate: Sir Richard Acland M.P. describes the Burma segment of *The Changing East* as 'Absolutely smashing film in colour'. In *Mandalay-Rangoon* this description is applicable even to the funeral procession. Here, despite the

military and police presence, what comes across most strongly is the sheer spectacle of this event. The industrial footage is more mundane. However, rather than portraying anxiety, it shows the daily life of Burma continuing: could this perhaps be the reason for Hodgkinson placing this footage at the close of his portrayal of Burma in the Changing East?

**Richard Osborne (July 2010)**

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Titles

**MONSOON ISLAND**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4673>

Technical Data

Year:

1934

Running Time:

13 minutes

Film Gauge (Format):

16mm Film

Colour:

Black/White

Sound:

Sound

Footage:

350 ft

Production Credits

Production Company

Empire Tea Marketing Expansion Board

**Synopsis**

Scenes of life in India. Elephants moving trees in a clearing, tea picking scenes, dispatching the tea on a barge. Harbour scenes of the boxes of tea being loaded on to a liner.

**Colonial Film Synopsis**

17<sup>th</sup> century map of Ceylon. Commentary states that the island has been known to traders for many centuries. Shots of interior forests. Footage of Buddhist temples and statues, many in ruins: 'The dry climate of the low country has been the means of preserving these ruins, which would have never have survived in the wet atmosphere of the hills'. Shots filmed from vehicle in motion as it travels a road at the top of mountain hills. Close-up of 17<sup>th</sup> century map, focusing on mountainous areas: 'it is the cool, damp upland climate which makes possible the large-scale cultivation of tea'. Shots of tea plantations filmed from moving vehicle; commentary outlines the beginnings of tea production in Ceylon in 1883. Elephants clearing forests to make way for tea plantations. Elephants transporting granite for the factory buildings and bungalow apartments of a new plantation. Long-shot of a tea



factory: 'Ceylon now has half a million acres under tea'. Tea-clippers filing out of the factory and heading for the plantations; commentary states that 'they are all Tamils from southern India' and that the women and children do the picking while men work in the factories and do the heavier work in the fields. Shots of women clipping tea.

Close-ups of a tea bush as the plant is explained in detail. Footage of the clipping process as it is described. The weighing of the women's tea clipping. Men spreading tea leaves on hessian shelves inside the factory where it is left to 'wither' for 24 hours. Tea being 'rolled' in the factory machines, a process that creates the tea's colour, flavour and strength. Further automated factory processes: fermentation; drying of the leaves; sorting of the leaves into various sizes; packaging of the tea leaves. Transportation of tea crates on barges, which take the product to large trading vessels. Long-shot of boat heading out to sea. Arrival of tea at a European (presumably British) dock; it is unloaded by workers who wear flat caps and waistcoats. Ends.

### Context

Basil Wright was the first recruit hired by John Grierson, head of the British government's Empire Marketing Board (EMB) film unit, which was formed in 1928 with the aim to promote imperial produce within Britain and so help form an imperial economic bloc (Grievson, 2011). The EMB created films for other agencies, including the Empire Tea Marketing Board and Ceylon Tea Board, who in 1933 sponsored a project to film four one-reel promotional films in Ceylon. Basil Wright was appointed as director for this project, and in late 1933 travelled to Ceylon where, with cameraman John Taylor, he shot over 23,000 feet of film (*CQ*, Summer 1934, 231). He claimed that 'I started shooting the film with a logic that I couldn't understand. I couldn't imagine why I was forcing myself or being forced by something inside me to shoot this material' (Thomas, 1979, 479-80). There were, however, specific influences. On the one hand, he was 'sucked into the Buddhist conception and enormously impressed by the excitement and beauty of the country', on the other, he was 'extremely indignant about the way the British colonial rule was operating' (Thomas, 1979, 480).

By the time Wright returned to England to edit his material, the EMB had morphed into the GPO Film Unit. Grierson remained at its head, and for a year and a half let loose 'an orgy of experimentation' within the new organisation (Wright, 1974, 134). Regarding the Ceylon film he informed Wright that he 'wouldn't accept anything except something special' (Taylor, 1988). The result was the four-part film *Song of Ceylon* (1934). Noted for its impressionistic style and the

innovative soundtrack that Wright created with Alberto Cavalcanti and the composer Walter Leigh, *Song of Ceylon* became one of the GPO Unit's most acclaimed films, and won the award for best film at the International Film Festival in Brussels in 1935.

The original commission to create four one-reel films was not abandoned, however. The material shot by Wright was also utilised to create the documentaries: *Monsoon Island*, *Negombo Coast*, *Dance of the Harvest* and *Villages of Lanka*. While regarding *Song of Ceylon* as his most successful work, Wright made few comments about these other films. It is unclear how involved he was in editing them, and there are conflicting statements regarding the input of John Taylor. Grierson stated that it was Taylor who 'fulfilled the actual contract with the Tea Propaganda Board' (Grierson, 1948, 34). However, in a 1988 interview Taylor commonly uses the term 'they' to describe the people at the GPO Film Unit who finalised this material (Taylor, 1988).

The tea trade in Ceylon began in 1867 and expanded rapidly. By 1900, 600 square miles of the country were under cultivation and the tea industry was responsible for more than half of the country's export earnings (Moxham, 2003, 183, 209). The ownership of the estates was primarily in British hands, and Britain also provided the primary market (*Romance of Tea*, 9). From the outset, plantations in Ceylon relied on imported labour. The local Sinhalese regarded it as against their way of life to work for hire; consequently the plantation owners relied primarily on Tamils from southern India (Moxham, 2003, 172). Indian Tamils eventually settled in large numbers, and by 1900 constituted 300,000 out of a population of just under four million (Moxham, 2003, 183-84).

The plantation workers were provided with 'extremely basic' accommodation, and were expected to work a ten-hour day with no break (Moxham, 2003, 180-81). The work was sexually divided, with women being responsible for tea clipping, while the men carried out the heavier agricultural work. Although conditions improved towards the end of British rule, Roy Moxham believes that 'it was a tragedy that so many of the British planters showed so little compassion, and made so little effort to improve life for their labourers beyond what was strictly in their own interest' (Moxham, 2003, 183).

Of the four films it is *Monsoon Island* that is most directly concerned with the tea industry. It also features some of the material of Buddhist statues and shrines that Wright had filmed. Buddhism has been practised in Ceylon since the second century B.C., and it remains the majority religion on the island. However, the island is also home to other religions, including Hinduism, which is practiced by the majority of Tamils of Indian descent.

### *Analysis*

The relationship between *Monsoon Island* and *Song of Ceylon* is interesting. On the one hand, while much of the material witnessed in *Monsoon Island* can also be seen in Basil Wright's longer film, the way that this film compiles and comments upon the material leads to a more straightforward and supportive account of colonial trade than is given in *Song of Ceylon*. On the other hand, because *Monsoon Island* is largely reliant on Basil Wright's footage, the film also retains some of his biases. This is most notable in relation to its discordant and disproportionate focus on Buddhism.

The film opens with its footage of Buddhist shrines, but goes on to focus upon the tea trade. It acknowledges the fact that the tea workers 'are all Tamils from southern India', but fails to mention their differing religious belief. Instead, climate provides the contrast that links the two strands of the film. It is argued that the ancient Buddhist shrines have been preserved because they are in the dry lowlands; in contrast the 'damp upland climate [...] makes possible the large-scale cultivation of tea'. This link appears forced, and the *Monthly Film Bulletin* was right to argue that this film would be more satisfactory if it were 'divided into two parts' (MFB, 1936, 73).

It is interesting to note the differing ways in which *Monsoon Island* and *Song of Ceylon* utilise the same film sources. In *Monsoon Island* Buddhism is presented as an ancient religion. The commentary discusses the 'highly developed civilisation that flourished in Ceylon from about the second century B.C.', but it also describes this civilisation as being something that has passed: it has 'left evidence in the ruins' of the Buddhist temples and statues that are featured on screen. These religious monuments are filmed in slow, lingering detail. At no point is Buddhism considered to be a living religion, and at no point are worshippers to be seen. *Song of Ceylon* uses its images of Buddhas and temples differently. They are used dynamically, often casting only fleeting images on the screen. They are also populated: sometimes with intercut shots of worshippers and dancers filmed elsewhere, at others times we see believers who make offerings and prayers. There are also significant structural differences between the two films. *Monsoon Island* places its portrait of Buddhism at the beginning of its film, and then moves on to the modernity of the tea industry. In *Song of Ceylon* Buddhism is featured circularly, appearing most prominently in the films opening and closing segments. As well as implying continuity, this pattern has deeper significance. Wright claimed that the film is structured as 'a magic circle, the Buddhist mandala' (Thomas, 1979, 481).

There are also significant differences in the way that the two films portray the tea trade. *Monsoon Island* follows a pattern that can be seen in other sponsored films. Tea production is shown in sequential order. There is a detailed focus on the processes taking place: figures are given for the acreage under plantation; the length of time it takes to grow the crops; the time period for which tea should be left to wither. Meanwhile, a discrete amount of information is given regarding the workers – we hear about the sexual segregation of the work and of how the women are paid in relation to the amount of tea that they pick. However, the implications of these practices are never addressed. *Song of Ceylon* features much of the same film material, which is gathered together continuously in the third section of the film, entitled ‘The Voice of Commerce’. The scenes are not shown in chronological order and neither are the processes outlined. ‘The Voice of Commerce’ was, in fact, the most controversial aspect of Wright’s film, in which his ‘ambivalence towards British imperialism’ was most clearly highlighted (Russell, 2007, 188). Here the images of the tea workers are accompanied by the sound of discordant radio waves and British voices calling out trading prices. It is this juxtaposition of sound that delivers *Song of Ceylon*’s message, rather than the way in which the scenes are filmed.

Indeed, there is nothing in the way in which the footage of plantation workers is shot that would help to undermine its use for tea marketing propaganda. Brian Winston claims that the footage was shot half-heartedly ‘one morning’, and that the process of filming this material gave Basil Wright a headache (Winston, 2008, 45). The workers aren’t focussed upon in any great detail (instead the concentration is upon the processes), and the plantation looks orderly and efficient. As such, in *Monsoon Island* the footage is used to outline a positive, if fairly pedestrian, account of the industry.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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Titles

**MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF INDIA**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5020>

Technical Data

Year:

1944

Running Time:

10 minutes

Film Gauge (Format):

16mm Film

Colour:

Black/White

Sound:

Sound

Footage:

431 ft

Production Credits

Production Company

Films Division, Government of India

**Additional Information**

Produced by Ezra Mir

Direction: Modhu Bose

Photography: K. Prabhakar

Editing: Pratap Parmar

Sound: Balkrishna Shah

**Synopsis**

Some of India's more popular musical instruments including the saraswati veena, the senai, the sursagar, and the sitar, the tabla and baya.

**Colonial Film Synopsis**

Title card: 'Musical Instruments of India' over picture of several instruments. Rolling script: 'Part of the great heritage of India is the rich variety of her musical instruments. There are more than 500

different sorts. Of these 300 are drums. Many of them are immemorially ancient in design and have deep religious significance. They are classified into three groups – string, wind and percussion – and each of these is again divided into many varieties’. Studio shot of Indian instruments: ‘each one has its own special, and often extremely difficult, technique’. Focus on the saraswati veena, displayed for the camera and then played by one of the ‘best-known exponents’ who is accompanied by another musician playing the same instrument. The commentary explains that the saraswati veena is used primarily in southern India and that ‘it is the key instrument because Indian music is the music of tones smaller than half tones, so called micro-tones’. Focus on the senai, which is displayed for the camera and then featured in a group performance. The commentary explains that it is commonly featured in wedding ceremonies and that ‘in spite of its simple appearance it is an extremely difficult instrument to play’. Focus on the sursagar, which is displayed for the camera and then featured in a solo performance ‘played by an expert’. The commentary states that this comparatively modern instrument ‘plays its own solo and own accompaniments’. Focus on the sitar, which is displayed for the camera and then featured in performance by a ‘master’ who is accompanied by a tabla player. The commentary outlines the history of the sitar, which ‘to the outside world is the Indian instrument’. It is northern India’s equivalent of the saraswati veena and is capable of expressing various moods. Focus on the tabla and baya, which are both shown being tuned and then being played by ‘one of the most famous tabla players in India’. The commentary explains the role of these instruments in providing ‘underlying rhythm’, and that they can also be performed solo. Credits.

### Context

In 1943 the Film Advisory Board (FAB), the body that had been created to oversee the production of wartime documentaries in India, was dissolved and Information Films of India (IFI) was created in its stead. Under this new organisation the Government of India assumed full responsibility for propaganda films. In addition, the government implemented the Defence of India Rule 44A, effective from September 1943, which required that every cinema in India show at least 2000 feet of government ‘approved’ film at each performance. To ensure that the IFI’s films reached as wide an audience as possible they were issued in separate English, Hindustani, Bengali, Tamil and Telugu versions (‘Note for Cut Motion’). This closer governmental control of film production was the response to two main threats: the unrest in the sub-continent caused by the nationalist Quit India movement, and the growing seriousness of the war in South-East Asia (Garga, 2007, 97).

*Musical Instruments of India* was produced by the head of the IFI, the Indian director Ezra Mir. During his period in charge, Mir increasingly steered the IFI documentary output away from military

propaganda towards films that reflected the socio-economic and cultural life of Indian people (Garga, 2007, 108-09). It was his belief that as Indians approached independence – which by 1943 was generally acknowledged as being ‘inevitable’ (Brown, 1994, 328) – they needed to be made aware of their heritage and of their arts (Garga, 2007, 108-09). The Indian government supported Mir’s aims. In March 1944, the Hon. Sir Syed Sultan Ahmed stated that ‘I believe this is the right line and this is why people are beginning to look forward to our films instead of groaning when the title is screened’ (Ahmed). Indian audiences had shunned IFI’s military films and industry critics had condemned them; in contrast Mir’s documentaries of national life gained greater popularity and acclaim (Garga, 2007, 110-11; Holmes, 1946, 44).

The constitution of IFI began to reflect these national interests. Winifred Holmes, a British filmmaker who at times worked for the organisation, noted that it ‘became more and more all-Indian during its years of growth’ (Holmes, 1946, 43). *Musical Instruments of India* is indicative of this change: all of its credited production team are Indian. It is edited by Pratap Parmar, one of the ‘mainstays’ of FAB and IFI (Garga, 2007, 43), and it is directed by Modhu Bose, who enjoyed a long career in Indian cinema as an actor and director, and who was married to the famous actress Sadhona Bose. An uncredited Englishman speaks the English-language commentary, however.

Mir’s productions received interest from abroad. *Musical Instruments of India* was one of IFI films about Indian arts and culture that were sent to America and shown at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Walt Disney remarked that ‘These films are tremendously interesting . . . it is films like these that create a better understanding and stimulate interest in other cultures’ (Garga, 2007, 110). Nevertheless, the IFI’s films of this period were primarily aimed at Indian audiences: by 1944 only a handful of IFI’s films were being distributed non-theatrically in Britain, and none were receiving a commercial release (Brock).

### **Analysis**

Various factors work together to make *Musical Instruments of India* a markedly different and more successful film than earlier FAB and IFI productions. Most of the earlier films had complicated propaganda aims, addressing both the War and (less overtly) India’s political situation; they were further complicated by being aimed at diverse audiences in India, Britain, the USA and other Allied countries (Woods, 2001, 298).



With its direct ambition of outlining some of the most widely used musical instruments in India, this film has none of the confusion of the earlier productions. The filmmakers make the most of their opportunity: this is a simple but elegant film. It is consistent in approach: the various instruments are all filmed in the same studio; they are all lit in the same way, with hard lighting that casts bold shadows on the studio wall behind them; and they are all treated in the same manner, with a general introduction to the instrument followed by a well-recorded musical performance. It is notable that this film gives more detailed and specific credits than earlier FAB or IFI productions, with K. Prabhakar being responsible for photography and Balkrishna Shah being responsible for sound.

The filmmakers provide a setting in which the instruments and the musicians can be treated with great respect. The film evolves at a measured pace, each instrument is filmed in great detail and from a number of angles. The commentary is provided with the appropriate images and the appropriate amount of time in which to explore the history of each instrument as well as their construction. There is regard here for India's culture (we learn that the sitar has evolved over a period of 700 years, and that the drumhead of the tabla is made with goatskin) and for its craftsmanship (the saraswati veena and the sitar are both 'beautifully carved'). Each instrument is highlighted with the performance of a short piece of music. Here the commentary respectfully withdraws, having made clear that we are hearing skilled exponents (the sanai is 'an extremely difficult instrument to play'; the sursagar is 'played by an expert'; the sitar is played with the 'delicate fingers of a master'). These performances begin with camerawork that focuses on the featured instrument, before moving to medium shots that reveal the master players.

*Musical Instruments of India* appears to be primarily concerned with fulfilling Ezra Mir's aim of informing Indians about their traditions and their arts. It begins with a rolling title, which boasts that a 'rich variety' of instruments is part of the 'heritage of India', and the film informs Indians from around the country about their different musical heritages (the commentary states that the saraswati veena is the principal stringed instrument of southern India, while the sitar fulfils this role in the north). However, the English-language commentary of the film at times gives the impression of being addressed to audiences beyond the sub-continent. The music is explained in relation to the western scale ('Indian music is the music of tones smaller than half tones, so called micro-tones'); and the viewer is informed of the fame and regard that the musicians have within India ('best-known exponent'; 'one of the most famous tabla players'), information that would presumably not have been necessary for the home audience. Nevertheless, one of the factors that differentiates films such

as *Musical Instruments of India* from the FAB and IFI films that address the War or contemporary political events, is that they are not concerned with fulfilling different propaganda aims for different audiences. Rather, with independence approaching, these films began to explore the sub-continent's rich cultural heritage.

**Richard Osborne (July 2010)**

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## Titles

**NEGOMBO COAST**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/730>

## Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Running Time:

9 minutes

\* Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film, 16mm Film

\* Colour:

Black/White

\* Sound:

Sound

## Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

Great Britain

\* Director

WRIGHT, Basil

\* Commissioning Company

Empire Tea Marketing Expansion Board

\* Production Company

GPO Film Unit

**Synopsis**

Everyday life in Ceylon, with a special emphasis on the fishing industry.

**Library Synopsis**

Archaic map of the Indian Ocean, followed by a small part of same enlarged; liners seen from the shore, with general shipping, buildings, native streets, with traffic and native vehicles, the coast, with palm trees, natives and trees, natives with nets, several shots of natives mending nets, family scenes, the coast with boats passing, including a catamaran.

**Colonial Film Synopsis**

Title card: 'Negombo Coast'. Archaic map of south east Asia, then a focus on Ceylon on the same map; commentary explains that 'Ceylon lies just off the most southerly point of India and has from ancient times been home to many races and people'. Sequence showing various boats in the harbour

at Colombo. Trading houses and street scenes in Colombo: Colombo 'ranks as the sixth port in the world'. Goods being unloaded from a ship in the harbour: 'Ceylon has always had the shipping facilities it needs, the Ceylonese have therefore never felt the need of a mercantile marine of their own'. The shoreline of a fishing village. Man and woman in a fishing village. Fishermen mending and inspecting their nets. A family sat outside their small village house. Shots filmed from the water of fishing boats passing by and people on the shore. A man fishing with a hand net in a lagoon. Men pushing a boat out into the sea. Fishing with large nets that are held between men on the shore and rowers in flat-bottomed boats a little way out to sea. A large haul of a variety of fish. Men on a large canoe 'twenty or thirty miles out at sea', fishing for bonito, common fish and sword fish. Shots of men setting bait and catching a fish called the 'seer'. Shots filmed from the shore showing the canoes returning home in the evening; the canoes are run on to the beach in full sail. Men leaving the canoes carrying large fish, which are placed in baskets on the shore. Women carrying fish in baskets on their heads. Shots of a depopulated beach. Ends.

### Context

Basil Wright was the first recruit hired by John Grierson, head of the British government's Empire Marketing Board (EMB) film unit, which was formed in 1928 with the aim of promoting imperial produce within Britain and so help form an imperial economic bloc (Grievson, 2011). The EMB created films for other agencies, including the Empire Tea Marketing Board and Ceylon Tea Board, who in 1933 jointly sponsored a project to film four one-reel promotional films in Ceylon. Basil Wright was appointed as director, and in late 1933 travelled to Ceylon where, with cameraman John Taylor, he shot over 23,000 feet of film (Wright, 1934, 231). As well as filming the promotional material, Wright also shot with a more ambitious and personal project in mind. He claims that he was 'sucked into the Buddhist conception and enormously impressed by the excitement and beauty of the country', and was also 'extremely indignant about the way the British colonial rule was operating' (Thomas, 1979, 480).

By the time Wright returned to England to edit his material, the EMB had morphed into the GPO Film Unit. John Grierson remained at its head, and for a year and a half let loose 'an orgy of experimentation' within this new organisation (Wright, 1974, 134). Regarding the Ceylon film, he informed Wright that he 'wouldn't accept anything except something special' (Taylor, 1988). The result was the four-reel film *Song of Ceylon* (1934). Noted for its impressionistic style and innovative soundtrack, *Song of Ceylon* became one of the GPO Unit's most acclaimed films, winning the award for best film at the International Film Festival in Brussels in 1935.

The original commission to create four one-reel films was not abandoned, however. The material shot by Wright was also utilised to create the documentaries *Negombo Coast*, *Dance of the Harvest*, *Monsoon Island*, and *Villages of Lanka*, which were also issued in 1934. While regarding *Song of Ceylon* as his most successful work, Wright made few comments about these other films. It is unclear how involved he was in editing them, and there are conflicting statements regarding the input of John Taylor. John Grierson stated that it was Taylor who ‘fulfilled the actual contract with the Tea Propaganda Board’ (Grierson, March 1948, 34). However, in a 1988 interview Taylor commonly uses the term ‘they’ to describe the people at the GPO Film Unit who finalised most of this material, although he does recall making cuts of *Negombo Coast* himself (Taylor, 1988). Rachel Low describes each of the one-reelers as being silent, except for *Dance of the Harvest* (Low, 2005, 73). However, *Negombo Coast* was made available in both sound and silent versions (MFB, April 1936, 56).

Negombo is a port town in the west of Ceylon, situated at the mouth of a large lagoon. The name ‘Negombo’ is a corruption of the local name *Miagamwa*, coined by the Portuguese during their colonisation of Ceylon in the sixteenth century. The Portuguese also introduced Catholicism, which remains the dominant religion in Negombo and the surrounding area. When Dutch forces captured several of Ceylon’s ports during the sixteenth century, control of some of them was handed to the rulers of the Kandy region of Ceylon. However, following its capture in 1640, the Dutch retained control of Negombo, valuing the local cinnamon lands (de Silva, 1981, 120). By the time the British took control of the region in 1796, the cinnamon business was in decline, and fishing was becoming established as the main local occupation. Eventually Negombo was established as Ceylon’s principal fishing port (‘Negombo City Overview’). Among the fishermen featured in this film are those of Duwa Island, a small community near Negombo, which is connected by a causeway to the mainland (‘Duwa Island’).

### Analysis

It is interesting to note the differences between *Song and Ceylon* and *Negombo Coast*, both in terms of their structure and in relation to their use of the same film materials. *Song of Ceylon* is structured in four parts. The first two parts cover Buddhist ceremonies and rural life, but then the third part jars with these portraits by introducing ‘The Voice of Commerce’, the technological and commercial changes wrought by the British colonisers. The film provides some resolution, however: the fourth part indicates that, despite this intrusion, the traditional life continues. Here, *Song of Ceylon* returns to Buddhist ceremonies and the film concludes as it began, featuring the same opening shots of the

island's plant life. In contrast, *Negombo Coast* is comprised of only two sections. Its opening features images of large trading ships, harbour activity, and the international trade in Ceylon's capital, Colombo; while the bulk of the film outlines the activities of the fishermen along the Negombo coastline.

Reflecting its commercial sponsorship, one of the differences between *Negombo Coast* and *Song of Ceylon* is that the former is almost entirely concerned with labour. Several of its images of fishermen can also be seen in the second section of *Song of Ceylon*. However, whereas the longer film situates the men's work within their social and cultural activities, *Negombo Coast* restricts itself to outlining their trade alone. For example, both films feature a multi-shot portrait of a net-caster from Duwa, described by Rachael Low as a 'stunning sequence' (Low, 2005, 74). In *Negombo Coast* each aspect of his activity is carefully outlined in the commentary, but in *Song of Ceylon* these images are instead accompanied by local dialect, and the film supplements a depiction of the relationship between this man and his son. It should be added that, for different reasons, neither film mentions the Catholic religion of fishermen: in *Negombo Coast* this is possibly because of its preoccupation with trade; in *Song of Ceylon* the reason might be the film's preoccupation with the Buddhist religion of the island.

*Song of Ceylon* posits international trade and communications as representing a modern intrusion: 'new clearings, new roads, new buildings, new communications, new developments of natural resources'. In *Song of Ceylon* the images of trading ships come in the third section, following on from the portrait of village life. In the preceding section we learn that the local men regard it 'a great shame' to work for hire. In this third section, however, the footage of commercial vessels is interwoven with images of plantation workers. The root of this alien commerce is indicated by the overdubbed sounds of British voices on the soundtrack, and its discordant nature is highlighted by the use of dissonant music. In contrast, *Negombo Coast* represents the foreign presence in Ceylon as one of the island's traditions. The film opens with a picture of an ancient map of Ceylon and its commentary then outlines the island's various colonisers and the fact that 'from the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Ceylon has traded with the world'. Here the images of large trading ships precede the documentation of the island's fishermen.

It is not hard to see why the commercial sponsors of *Song of Ceylon* would have objected to its portrayal of international commerce. However, *Negombo Coast* also has the effect of casting doubt on the benefits of foreign trade. Its opening section mentions tea among a roll call of products that are exported from the island. The film aims to depict Ceylon's foreign trade in the most positive light,

arguing that overseas traders have provided Ceylon with 'the shipping facilities it needs'. Consequently, the Ceylonese have 'never felt the need of a mercantile marine of their own'. However, the next line of the film's commentary complicates this benign portrayal of foreign commerce: 'they [the Ceylonese] make good sailors, however, and fishing is the chief means of livelihood of the people living in the numerous little villages along the coast'. This line of commentary is used as a bridge between the two sections of the film. Perhaps unwittingly, it also sets up a contrast between the film's two sections. The viewer can clearly witness the difference between the grand buildings of Colombo that service the international trade, and the basic rustic homes of the fishermen. Moreover, unlike *Song of Ceylon*, this is not a circular film; there is no resolution and nor does there appear to be any relationship between the world trade that takes place at Colombo, and the localised fishing trade of Colombo.

**Richard Osborne (November 2009)**

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FILM NUMBER

PMO 24

FILM TITLE:

**PARTITION OF INDIA**

[AMATEUR FILM BY CAPTAIN CLIFFORD WILLIAMS] [Alternative]

PRODUCTION DATE:

8/1947

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

SHORT SUMMARY:

Amateur film shot by Captain Clifford Williams (Sikh Regiment) when a junior staff officer with the Punjab Boundary Force, attached to 11th Infantry Brigade, records the eastward movement of Hindu refugees across the Punjab into India and the westward flight of Moslem refugees towards Pakistan. Ground level views cover packed transport and the aftermath of two massacres (perpetrators unidentified), while aerial views from a Lysander convey the extent of the disorder at the time of Indian independence and the creation of East and West Pakistan.

NOTES:

Cameraman: Major Williams died in October 2000.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Williams, Clifford H (Captain): cameraman

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

Std 8mm

NUMBER OF REELS:

2

LENGTH:

450 ft

RUNNING TIME:

37 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

Silent



## LANGUAGE OF SUBTTILES:

None

**Colonial Film Synopsis**

Panned shot of refugee camp, pitched beside a railway line. Refugee camp with three Indian soldiers standing guard. Indian boy sat on army jeep with Indian soldiers gathered round. Shots of a large refugee camp, soldiers and Indian helpers feed the refugees. Men and women dig – possibly for a mass grave - as an army officer looks on. European and Asian soldiers displaying what appears to be home-made weapons and armour. British and Asian soldiers inspecting the exposed engine of an old plane. Aerial shots: refugee camps; convoys of refugees; steam trains with people crowded on their roofs; a town; a city showing evidence of damage to buildings. An amphibious craft. Indian soldiers talking to a civilian outside a building that says ‘MUNSHI RAM’ above its doorway. Indian soldiers inspecting damaged buildings. Soldiers registering civilians. Daily life: a man working a loom; oxen ploughing; people fetching water from a well. British and Sikh soldiers beside a propeller plane. Aerial shots of Amritsar, showing evidence of damage to buildings. A rickshaw. British soldier beside a stone mileage sign reading ‘Tibet 192; Narkanda 35; Kufri 4’. A diesel train in a station. Sikh and European soldiers shown with a variety of military vehicles. Soldiers instructing people in a refugee camp. Army trucks in motion, crowded with refugees. Panned shots of a refugee camp. Sikh soldier getting into a propeller plane. Aerial shots of a refugee convoy. Indian and European soldiers beside a propeller plane which says ‘Governor General of India’ on its front. Jawaharlal Nehru (?) and other politicians shown beside the plane. Corpses among scrubland. British soldiers beside a grave for an Anglican burial. Jeeps and tanks in a refugee camp. A swollen river beneath a metal bridge. Several shots of a crowded refugee camp. An Indian soldier dispersing food. Dead cattle and destroyed property in a village. A camp which has dead beasts at its perimeter. A train that has reached a ruined bridge. Large numbers of refugees gathered around and trying to access a crowded train. Women making bread. A young Indian boy and girl. Indian soldiers and an Indian youth beside a jeep. Indian soldiers beside a grave. Sign saying ‘H.O. 11. INF. BOE.’ Indian soldiers with papers exiting a large, official building. Locals in a village that has been attacked. Posed shots of men and girls in a refugee camp. A family with their herd of cattle. An oxen-driven well. Indian men constructing a footbridge. Indians on horseback driving cattle. Mounds – possibly graves – in a refugee camp. A man and boy digging graves. A crowd of people washing themselves in a city street. A crowded steam train on a damaged railway, it crosses a bridge on the one good line. Posed shots of men and boys in a refugee camp. Refugees on lorries. People on a dusty road, oxen-carts piled high with their belongings. This exodus passes a signpost saying ‘Amritsar’. Ducks and birds

feeding. Military personnel and jeeps. Another camp. A naked corpse. Crowds in a street. A flock of birds. A cattle's corpse being picked at by a dog. Crowded vehicles heading down a road. Soldiers forming the armed guard for a train. A convoy of military vehicles, soldiers in the troop carriers are armed. Soldiers carrying the corpse of an animal. Locals cleaning their clothes in a river. Government buildings in Delhi. Indian soldiers and a dog in a jeep. A street in Delhi. A view of some mountain tops. A European soldier (Captain Clifford Williams?) swimming in a river with boys. He joins a party of Europeans on the riverbank who are laughing at his antics. The party laugh and wave to camera. Ends.

### **Context**

The partition of India was announced in the Indian Independence Act, passed on 18 July 1947. The division of the country on the basis of religious demographics led to the creation on 14 August 1947 of the two-state Dominion of Pakistan, which was predominantly Muslim, and on 15 August 1947 of the Union of India, which was predominantly Hindu. Although no migration was intended to occur (Jeffrey, 1974, 504), partition resulted in the transfer of up to 12.5 million people across the new borders; the number of people killed in the violence that accompanied this divide has been variously estimated at between several hundred thousand and a million (Metcalf and Metcalf, 2006, 221-22).

The area that witnessed the greatest population movement and the most widespread disturbances was the newly divided Punjab Province. The June 3<sup>rd</sup> Partition Plan stipulated that 17 districts of the state would now form Western Punjab in Pakistan, while the 12 remaining districts would form Eastern Punjab in India. The exact lines of partition had still not been determined when the violence broke out. Sikhs, who formed a large minority population in the Punjab and who had been denied their own country in the plans for partition, began large-scale attacks against Muslims in the Amritsar district on 9 August (Ahmed, 2007). The violence continued until October, with the Muslims in Western Punjab in turn targeting Sikhs (Jeffrey, 1974, 505). As the violence intensified, villages emptied and refugee columns formed (Jeffrey, 1974, 508). Trains and railways were targeted, and on 24 August rail travel in the state was declared officially unsafe (Jeffrey, 1974, 504). This did not halt the migration. It has been estimated that within a year and a half of partition, half a million people had moved in each direction across the divided state (Brown, 1994, 339).

The Punjab Boundary Force was constituted on July 17 to monitor events in the 12 central districts of the Punjab (Ahmed, 2007). The Force, which represented the last incarnation of the old British

India Army, had an operational existence of only thirty-two days, from 1 August to 1 September (Jeffrey, 1974, 491). As well as dealing with the violence, they also had to undertake the initial monitoring of refugee camps, some of which held up to 50,000 people (Jeffrey, 1974, 509). The PBF in addition helped move refugees to both parts of the state, transferring them in their lorries (Jeffrey, 1974, 509).

The PBF was not able to contain the violence. The number killed in this region has been estimated at anywhere between 20,000 and more than 600,000 by the end of 1947 (Jeffrey, 1974, 520). According to Ishtiaq Ahmed, the Force was 'woefully undermanned', with only 12,000 men to cover 37,500 square miles (Ahmed, 2007). As a ratio of the local population the PBF stood at 1:630 (Jeffrey, 1974, 500). The PBF was also ill equipped. Robin Jeffrey has claimed that 'In aircraft and air support, the Force was remarkably deficient' (Jeffrey, 1974, 513). Further problems were that the PBF was comprised of troops of differing religious backgrounds, and that the majority of its battalions included men from the Punjab. Jeffrey notes that 'These troops were, in many cases, being asked to fire on their co-religionists or to protect members of another community' (Jeffrey, 1974, 514). He believes that it was the collapse of morale among the PBF that led to the decision to disband it (Jeffrey, 1974, 515). At midnight on 2 September the responsibility for law and order in the Punjab was transferred to the governments of India and Pakistan.

This amateur film was shot in August 1947 by Captain Clifford Williams, who was then serving as a junior staff officer in the Sikh Regiment of the Punjab Boundary Force. The Sikh Regiment was founded in 1846 and historically has had close ties with the Sikh people of the Punjab.

### **Analysis**

Captain Williams' surviving film is scratched and grainy and therefore some of the scenes are difficult to discern. This includes some of the possibly more disturbing footage in the film: is the large pit that soldiers are seen digging in a refugee camp a mass grave? Are the numerous mounds shown in another camp more graves? Are some of the bodies that we see dead or alive? It is also unclear whether or not one of the people featured in the footage is the leader of the Indian National Congress, Jawaharlal Nehru. Despite its inconclusiveness, the film remains a valuable document of the effects of partition in the Punjab.

The film is wide-ranging, not only in terms of the subjects it captures, but also in relation to the ways in which they are filmed. It includes footage of many different refugee camps, which are filmed

with a view to conveying their scale. This is achieved either through the use of panned shots, filmed from within the camps, or by footage filmed by Williams from one of the PFB's few operational planes. His aerial shots also capture the vast numbers of people migrating along the Punjab's roads. In addition, they include shots of Punjab's cities, notably Amritsar. The aerial footage is usually filmed with a motion of passing from right to left, but it is not possible to work out whether this is meant to imply population movement heading in a particular direction. There are, however, clues relating to the Williams's own progress: he occasionally films road signs that mark the distance to local towns, unfortunately not all of the footage of these signposts remains clear.

Rail travel is a recurring feature of the film: the first camp pictured is pitched beside a railway line; some of the aerial shots show trains in motion, others show crowded trains. Elsewhere the footage shows the damage wrought to the railway system, including shots of destroyed viaducts, and of the Punjab Boundary Force forming an armed guard for a train.

The film captures the discrepancy between the small number of Punjab Boundary Force soldiers and the hordes of people with whom they had to deal. A panned shot of one of the large refugee camps eventually brings into view the three Indian soldiers who stand guard. We also get to see something of the mixed constitution of the Force: in one scene British, Sikh, and other Indian soldiers are shown with what appears to be captured makeshift arms and armour. Here there is surprising levity as the soldiers pose with the weapons for the camera. We see further evidence of the work they undertook: the distribution of food in the camps; the transfer of people in army lorries. One thing that is not seen is any direct engagement with violence. We do see its effects, however: burnt out buildings; the bloated carcasses of slaughtered animals; a number of human bodies that are clearly dead. It is possible that the film follows the work of the PBF through to its conclusion: the final images are filmed outside the Punjab, showing first the streets of Delhi, and then a white soldier with friends and/or family, laughing and waving to camera.

This film is full of familiar images that can be seen in other films about India made by the British. Here they take on a different hue. Footage of Indians crammed onto the roofs of railway carriages is a common sight, but it has a graver impact here. Similarly, this film's ethnographical studies, in which locals are lined up for the camera's gaze, have a disturbing story to tell. Other images make an impact through their unexpectedness. Included are practices that crop up regularly in documentary

film: locals working looms, ploughing, fetching water from wells, carrying goods upon their heads. Here these images take their place alongside footage of death, destruction and mass migration.

**Richard Osborne (May 2010)**

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FILM TITLE:

**PLANES OF HINDUSTAN**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2027>

PRODUCTION DATE:

9/1940

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

India

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Wadia Movietone

SHORT SUMMARY:

Documentary on life in the Indian Air Force (IAF) culminates with a plea to Indian audience for more and better planes for the IAF.

FULL SUMMARY:

At the headquarters of the Indian Air Force in the Punjab, Hawker Harts of 1 Squadron stand on the airfield representing the only armed unit of the Crown entirely officered by Indians. Squadron-Leader Mukerjee and his pilots, all Cranwell-trained, climb into their Harts and fly in formation. Over views of the quarters, bar and canteen similar to RAF barracks, commentary describes excellent facilities enjoyed by men and also their families. Meals are served on Royal cypher crockery in the airmen's mess, officers have their own room and a baby is weighed at the Child Welfare Centre. Parachutes are packed prior to supply canisters being dropped: a Hart drops a bomb with perfect accuracy, over remark that "the British Empire has already shown it knows a thing or two about accurate bombing". Another Hart swoops low to pick up a message from the ground and reconnaissance photos are taken. Back on the ground the planes are serviced and men relax off-duty in the gymnasium, playing hockey and swimming. "Famous" Vickers Valentia transport bomber is used for travels to and fro; Squadron-Leader takes off in Blenheim. Film from Universal and British Movietone News of a Battle of Britain dogfight is used to stress need for more planes and more men in addition to the 10,000 who have already volunteered in order to defend India from attack, suggested by final sequence of army air cooperation against unspecified enemy beyond hills.

NOTES:

Production: Bombay Board of Film Censors certificate dated 24 September 1940 precedes film and indicates length as 1110 ft.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Radcliffe Genge, G: director

Pathy, P V (Dr): cameraman

Pathy, P V (Dr): film editor

Hardy, Marcella: assistant editor

Tata, Burjore M: sound recordist

Melody Trio: music performer

PRODUCTION CAST:

Radcliffe Genge, G: commentary

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

LPU

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/N

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

1013 ft

RUNNING TIME:

11 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTTLES:

None

*Context*

*Planes of Hindustan* was one of the earliest World War II documentaries to be made in India and it was the second to be produced by the company Wadia Movietone, following their earlier *He's in the Navy* (1940). For both films the same core crew of director, editor and sound recordist were employed.

These projects were initiated by Desmond Young, who worked as chief press officer and as a member of the war propaganda team in the Government of India (Garga, 2007, 60). Young was operating in response to a Ministry of Information request to produce war propaganda for distribution within India. In his autobiography he claimed that, before the War, documentary films 'had never been seen in India, let alone be [sic] made' (quoted in Garga, 2007, 63). To fill this void Young initially turned to British advertising agencies operating in India believing that 'it was their business to know about selling through pictures' (quoted in Garga, 2007, 63). However, the ad agencies knew little about making films and therefore enlisted the help of Indian film studios.

Wadia Movietone was owned and run by J.B.H. Wadia, one of the senior figures in Indian filmmaking. Wadia, a nationalist and a founder member of the Radical Democratic Party, justified his production of films that furthered Britain's war aims by arguing that supporting democracy in the face of Nazi aggression 'would definitely lead to independence for India too' (Mulugundam, 2002, 70).

On Young's instructions the early propaganda films were dubbed into various Indian languages, but he found that distribution within the sub-continent remained a problem (Young, 29 October 1940, 1). To that end in July 1940 India's first official film body, the Film Advisory Board (FAB), was constituted. Its first chairman was J. B. H. Wadia and *Planes of Hindustan* formed part of the first catalogue of films. The aim of the FAB was to give the Indian public 'films of interesting war subjects' and others of 'informatory value'. It resolved 'to make every effort to see that all cinemas exhibit these films' (Garga, 2007, 65). In order to help this drive the majority of the films were distributed free of charge. (Young, 29 October 1940, 2).

Because their films were aimed at a largely illiterate audience Wadia and Young were of the opinion that they should be easy to understand. Wadia argued that the films should be told in a 'straight-from-the-shoulder manner', adding that 'If a democratic form of government, despite its imperfections, is more desirable than a totalitarian one, they [the Indian audience] must be reminded of this all-important fact over and over again' (Garga, 2007, 72). In his autobiography Young stated that 'if recruiting were to be extended beyond the so-called "martial classes"' life in the services would need to be portrayed in the most simple terms (Garga, 2007, 63).



Within the Indian military establishment the air force was unique. As the film states, it was the 'only armed unit of the Crown entirely officered by Indians'. The Indian Air Force (IAF) was established in 1933 and this film features one of its first five pilots, Subroto Mukerjee. By the time this film was made he was squadron leader and he would later become the first Indian Chief of the Air Staff. The IAF grew rapidly during the war, rising in numbers from 1,600 to 28,500 men (Jackson, 2006, 367).

### *Analysis*

Even allowing for the working methods outlined by Young and Wadia, *Planes of Hindustan* is a crude documentary. The camerawork is often uncertain and there are some poor tracking shots. The film begins with an unsteady shot as the cameraman hurriedly attempts to follow the movement of a car towards a hangar. Later there is a scene that is supposed to depict the 'accurate bombing' of the IAF; here it is the cameraman who misses his target. The film is also hampered by the speed with which it was made. Young only gave his producers six weeks in which to deliver their films. He later admitted that 'It was a measure of my ignorance that I thought [this] should be ample time to make a ten-minute short . . . soundtrack and all' (Garga, 2007, 64). A further drawback for this film was the material that was to hand. J.B.H. Wadia recalled the shock of the editor and cameraman of *Planes of Hindustan* in finding that 'the total strength of the Royal Air Force Centre was four fighter planes, one of which he had to film from'. He adds that 'to give the impression of a formidable force ready to meet the enemy's challenge was impossible' (Garga, 2007, 64). Instead the film relies on footage of Battle of Britain dogfights, which the commentary admits is taken from Universal and British Movietone newsreels. This footage strikes a discordant note in a documentary that is supposed to be about the IAF.

That said, the airborne sequences featuring the IAF pilots are among the more successful in the film. The cameraman seems to be more at home in the air than he is on land, and he captures some of the skilled manoeuvres of the IAF squadron. He also shows how dashing and self-assured these fighter pilots are. The four pilots have the nonchalance and something of the fashion sense of the British flying ace about them: one of them has a small moustache and slicked-back hair. They are also shown as being equals with the British military. In a scene in which they visit a British army officer there is no sense of them deferring to him.

It is this factor that marks the clearest difference between this film and *He's in the Navy*. The earlier film is condescending in its treatment of young naval recruits; they are witnessed as being at the

bottom of the military chain of command and their training is played for laughs. *Planes of Hindustan*, on the other hand, is proud of the fact that the IAF is officered by Indians and it depicts Indian personnel as being capable and mature; in place of the pratfalls of the earlier film we witness a 'studious' Indian officer in his book-filled dormitory. The senior Indian officers are shown sharing the same privileged life as their British equivalents. We witness them relaxing together in the officers' mess and 'rival[ing] each other as splash makers' in a swimming pool. This is not to say that colonial power is entirely absent from the film. One scene depicts an elaborately dressed Indian servant working in the officers' mess. His work is overseen by a white officer. It also emphasised that the crockery that the Indian officers eat and drink from bears the Royal cypher.

In certain respects the propaganda purposes of *He's in the Navy* and *Planes of Hindustan* are similar. Both films are keen to depict the up-to-date methods and well-appointed compounds of the military in India. *Planes of Hindustan* comes unstuck in this respect: the dated biplanes of the IAF can be contrasted with the superior British and German aircraft visible in the borrowed footage. This, in fact, is where the propaganda purposes of the two films diverge. *He's in the Navy's* aim is to encourage more naval recruits; *Planes of Hindustan*, meanwhile, is concerned with gaining more planes for the Indian Air Force. In this respect the film is quite blatant. It directly addresses the Indian audience, saying 'more planes, and yet more planes are needed. That is up to you, men and women of India'. The audience is warned that this increase is required for the defence of the homeland. The film concludes melodramatically, its commentary wishing that 'the planes of Hindustan will so grow in numbers as to cast a protective shadow over the whole of this vast land'. However, it was events outside this film that occasioned the growth of the IAF.. In late 1941 Japan entered the war and the air defence of South-East Asia subsequently formed a vital part of the Allied campaign.

Richard Osborne (September 2009)

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 Young, Desmond, 'Publicity through Films', letter 29 October 1940, India Office Records, file L/I/1/684 – Films for Publicity Purposes General File 1939 and 1940.

Titles

**PRINCE AND PRINCESS OF WALES IN INDIA**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4544>

Technical Data

Year:

1905

Running Time:

6 minutes

Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

Colour:

Black/White

Sound:

Silent

Footage:

381 ft

Production Credits

Production Company

Pathé Frères Cinema

**Synopsis**

No main title. The Prince and Princess of Wales [later George V and Queen Mary] disembark from a launch (92). A garden party with the Royal Party on a raised dais (128). The Prince enters a landau; riding in a state coach through the streets. Later in another landau he is escorted by Indian cavalry (381ft).

**Colonial Film Synopsis**

No main title. Men in military uniform disembarking from a small launch. A second launch from which the Prince and Princess of Wales (later George V and Queen Mary) disembark, they are greeted by five men (one of whom is Indian) and are followed by other guests. The royal party at the top of some stairs at the harbour. Military parade, beginning with soldiers in kilts followed by others in white military uniform. Long shot of the Royal Party on a raised dias; camera pans to the left revealing select audience composed of British and Indians. Soldiers on a parade ground, camera pans to the right bringing into view a landau. The Prince enters the landau, which then moves off. City street lined with Indians; Royal procession enters from the left. Troops on horseback parading

through city streets. A convey of camels passing down a city street. Long shot of teeming crowds in a city. A procession, featuring Indian and British troops on horseback and a Royal carriage.

### **Context**

Between November 1905 and March 1906, the Prince and Princess of Wales (later George V and Queen Mary) embarked on a tour of India, which represented the most extensive survey of the sub-continent undertaken by members of the Royal Family. The tour began in Bombay, described by the contemporary observer Theodore Morrison as being 'a city in which, more than anywhere else, Indian society has assumed a Western complexion' (Morrison, 1905, 916). The royal couple then travelled throughout India and also visited Burma. Included in the itinerary was Bengal, which was then witnessing nationalist unrest, prompted by the decision of the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, to partition the state (Morrison, 1905, 916). Morrison describes the tour of the royal couple as being of 'great political importance', arguing that it would help to cement 'loyalty to the Crown' and also 'counteract the secessionist tendency' (Morrison, 1905, 915, 917).

The Prince and Princess were both affected by their visit to India. Mary developed a romantic passion for the country: following her return to England she was known to remark 'Lovely India, beautiful India' (Edwards, 1984, 147). The Prince was shaken out of what Anne Edwards describes as his 'political complacency' (Edwards, 1984, 147-48). His experiences in the sub-continent caused him to remark on several matters. He spoke out about the lack of contact between British and Indians, and later wrote critically that the 'general bearing of the European towards the Native was to say the least unsympathetic' (Rose, 1983, 65). He also argued that the Indian Princes 'ought to be treated with greater tact and sympathy, more as equals than inferiors' (Rose, 1983, 65). His views differed from those of Lord Curzon, who had been relieved of his Viceroyalty shortly before the visit, but stayed on to perform the official greeting in Bombay. Curzon had argued against giving Indians senior government posts due to the fact that they 'are crooked-minded and corrupt'; he therefore believed that the British had 'to go on ruling them' (Rose, 1983, 66). In contrast the Prince could see that Indians should be given 'a greater share in the government' (Rose, 1983, 66). This is not to say that he supported nationalists' aims. He protested that the Indian National Congress 'misrepresents every action of the Government and holds us up to the ignorant masses as monsters and tyrants' (Rose, 1983, 66), and he spoke of the 'absolute justice and integrity of our rule' (Reed, 1906, 471). The Prince also commented on other aspects of Indian society. He chastised Gopal

Gokhale, the president of the INC, about the poor treatment of women within the Indian social system (Rose, 1983, 67).

The royal couple nevertheless only received a partial view of India. Anne Edwards notes that they were ‘protected from the true plight of the Indian people’ (Edwards, 1984, 149). The schedule of the tour was altered to avoid visiting Ajmer, which was suffering from famine and plague. In contrast, the royal couple were throughout ‘entertained in a lavish style unequalled in their own Court or any other they had been to’ (Edwards, 1984, 151).

This film of the royal tour was made in 1905 by the British division of the French film company Pathé Frères. It features the initial stages of the tour – the landing and reception at Bombay, and a Durbar in Indore, the city to which the party was redirected following the cancelled visit to Ajmer (Edwards, 1984, 149). In a reception speech that can be witnessed in this film, the Prince stated that he wished to make ‘an acquaintance with the [sub-continent’s] various classes, official and non-official, British and Indian’ (Reed, 1906, 14). However, G. F. Abbott, who reported on the royal tour for the Calcutta newspaper *The Statesman*, wrote of the visit to Bombay that ‘For a whole week there was nothing but the clattering of hoofs, the rattling of wheels, the thunder of salutes, the glitter of state-coaches, the sheen of maharajas, and the infliction of platitudinous oratory’ (Abbott, 1906, 20).

### **Analysis**

G. F. Abbott’s statement is fair description of the subject matter captured in this film. We see the royal party, accompanied by Lord and Lady Curzon, being received by Maharajas as they land in Bombay; there is footage of the Prince’s reception speech; and in this six-minute film there are no less than five military parades. Abbott writes of having the ‘privilege to be bored’ at these functions, and notes that ‘their poor Royal Highnesses endured it all with truly princely patience’ (Abbott, 1906, 20).

This film does not provide us with a chance to gauge the royal couple’s reactions. They are commonly filmed from a distance, and frequently it is difficult to distinguish them from other dignitaries who populate the screen. The film is nevertheless revealing in relation to the itinerary provided for the Prince and Princess. The India that they witness in Bombay is one of courtly and military ritual. Moreover, their parades of the city’s streets are hurried affairs: we see them being rushed through Bombay in horse-drawn carriages; it is difficult for us to concentrate upon the royal couple, just as it would have been for the crowds who have lined the streets.

In some of the scenes we witness the local people in the manner that the royal party would have witnessed them: as a distant and undifferentiated mass. In others we get a view of the 'ordinary' people of India that would have been denied to the royal couple. In one sequence the cameraman begins filming a street prior to the arrival of a parade. On the far pavement impoverished men can be seen, and they provide a contrast with the richly decorated pageantry that follows.

There is also an interesting scene in which the cameraman films camels being herded down a city street. Here he has diverted his attention from the royal formalities. However, the shot provides a visual reminder of a scene that has preceded it: the cameraman films the camel convoy from the same position that he has filmed an earlier royal procession, and as they advance they cut similar diagonals across the screen. These two scenes leave the impression of parallel but separate worlds. There is one further sequence that is filmed away from the royal formalities. Tellingly, it provides a greater chance to focus on the people of Bombay than any of the scenes in which the Prince and Princess are present. The cameraman films a teeming city street, and with a panning shot he attempts something of an ethnographical study of the people. Unfortunately, his study suffers from the fact that it is a long shot and is a little out of focus.

It is with two further panned shots that the cameraman creates his most revealing sequences. The first occurs as the Prince makes his reception speech. The camera is initially focussed on the Prince as he delivers his oration on a dais. It then pans to the left and reveals the fringes of the invited crowd. Here European ladies can be seen mingling with finely dressed Parsi women, a sight that would only have been possible in a westernised city like Bombay. Stanley Reed remarks that 'Elsewhere in India the rigours of the purdah shut off well-born women from all participation in public ceremonies' (Reed, 1906, 9). (In a picture featured in Stanley Reed's book, the cameraman can be seen filming this shot.)

A reverse motion, moving from left to right, and from the people towards the Prince, is used in the second of these panned shots, filmed at the Durbar in Indore. Here the cameraman pans steadily across the Prince's stationary carriage, filming the Indian soldiers who tend the horses and the guards who hold open the carriage door, and then finally the Prince, who appears and quickly enters the carriage. In both of these sequences the panning movement is used to almost political ends: it democratises the action, giving as much time to serving men and to spectators as it does to the

Prince. And, once again, the cameraman gets a closer and more prolonged view of the people of India than was afforded to the royal couple themselves.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

#### **Works cited**

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Reed, Stanley, *The Royal Tour in India: A Record of the Tour of T.R.H. The Prince and Princess of Wales in India and Burma, from November 1905 to March 1906* (Bombay: Bennett, Coleman & Co, 1906).

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**The QUETTA EARTHQUAKE**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4587>  
 Title Ref: Sift 11018  
 Director:  
 Prod. Country: GB  
 Year: 1935  
 1st Release: 1935  
 Prodn. Company:  
 Release Country:  
 Format: 16  
 Run Time (Mins): 10  
 Length: 263 Feet 80 Metres  
 Colour Code: B  
 Colour System:  
 Sound System: SLNT  
 Language:  
 Dubbed: N  
 Subtitled: N  
 Credits  
 Photography SKRINE, Clarmont

**NFA synopsis**

Amateur film. The aftermath of the 1935 Quetta earthquake.

**Synopsis**

"The Quetta Earthquake. May 31<sup>st</sup> 1935. 3.3. A.M.". "Dawn: The Residency, Mastung". Panned shot right to left across rubble of the Residency, turbaned Indian visible in remaining doorway. Other ruined buildings. "A Cup of Tea". Two crouching Indians drinking tea, two men stood behind them. Crates are visible, possibly of retrieved possessions. Panned shot across ruined building. Indian men, crossing a field in front of a destroyed house, saved furniture from the building now situated outside. "Clearing a track for the Baby Austin through Mastung Bazaar". Turbaned Indian lifts rubble from tree-lined street, panned shot to two others who help. Footage of major building collapse. Family in front of building, featuring awnings around one remaining wall. "Culvert on Quetta Mastung road with Abutments Displaced". Bridge that just about stands, Baby Austin driven around it.



“Bruce Road, Quetta, at noon on May 31<sup>st</sup>. Indian troops on rescue duty”. Looking down a ruined main street, many local men present as well as horse and cart. Troops also visible. More collapsed buildings. Troop carriers, bearing troops. Ruined shops. Indians among heavy rubble. “In Quetta’s ‘West End’”. Street filled with debris, some people walk down it, one wheeling a bicycle. “The Treasury and Law Courts”. Pan across ruins of official buildings, archways remain but roof gone. “The Residency”. Baby Austin in driveway. Ruined wall. Soldiers present. “Bungalows of Civil Officials on Lytton Road”. Bungalows completely flattened. “A week later. H. H. The Khan of Kalat inspecting the Field Hospital at Mastung”. Cars and lorries parked in a field, military personnel present. Khan of Kalat’s grand car, then footage of Khan himself accompanied by European. Locals in background. Impoverished woman and child. Khan walks to woman, who begs, he then pushes her away and she falls to the ground. “In the Zenana Hospital, Shani Bagh, Mastung”. Khan with Indian and European doctors at outdoor hospital. European nurse working beneath a tree. Europeans and Indians all dressed in western clothing at hospital.

“Brahui Tribesmen of Kalat State fleeing southwards from the stricken area”. Tribal people on road carrying possessions by camel. Their tents pitched at the base of mountains. “Dingra Village: 140 inhabitants 110 deaths”. Panned shot across makeshift camp. “Mt. Chhiltan, 10,800 ft. Showing marks of rockfalls”. Scarred mountains. Large military camp. “Four months later Bruce Road survivors salvaging their shops under supervision of claims officer”. Streets still full of rubble. Locals rummaging for possessions. European official discussing with one of the Indians. Indians among rubble. Ruined shops and retrieved goods. “Indian Boy Scouts and Rovers from the Punjab at work in the City”. European officer among rubble. Scouts find body among rubble and carry it away. Helpers clearing rocks. Officer instructing scouts. Another body found under corrugated iron. Bodies carried to back of small van. “At the Burning Ghats”. Lorry load of soldiers. Two Indians among rubble, one with sack. “Funeral Rites according to the Sikh faith”. Sikhs building pyre overseen by European officer. Service is read. “Taking Quetta Away in lorries: A drag-line excavator at work”. Large crane clearing rubble.

### **Context**

Quetta is the capital city of the Baluchistan province, formerly in India, but now part of Pakistan. It is located in the south-west of the country about fifty miles from the Afghanistan border. The state did not come under permanent British control until 1876. From this point onwards Quetta served

the Raj primarily as a military garrison. Around 12,000 soldiers were stationed in and around the city, charged with the task of quelling disturbances with Afghan tribesmen (Gun, 2007, 340).

In the early morning hours of 31 May 1935 an earthquake with a magnitude of around 7.5 on the Richter scale struck the area. Quetta, which had had many high-rise buildings, was razed to the ground. In the British parliament the death toll was recorded as follows: 'European casualties amount to about 190 killed and 240 injured. In Quetta itself, out of a population of 45,000, between 20,000 and 30,000 have been killed' ('India (Quetta Earthquake Disaster)'). The earthquake was at the time the deadliest in present-day Pakistan's history (Carayannis).

The military responded to the situation both promptly and in force. Within three hours of the earthquake an operation was underway to help save the lives of the injured; to bury the dead according to religious custom; and to restore communications in the city (Gun, 2007, 341). By 2 June 1935 it was determined that there was no further hope of rescuing people alive ('1<sup>st</sup> Queen's at Quetta'). Consequently, the city was sealed under military guard. The military were trying to check the spread of disease from corpses that remained buried in the rubble. They were also protecting the city, which had begun to be targeted by looters from local tribes, and had orders to shoot on sight ('1<sup>st</sup> Queen's at Quetta'). These tribes had, however, also suffered in the earthquake. Villages throughout the surrounding area had been destroyed (Carayannis).

Clarmont Percival Skrine, who shot this footage of the earthquake, was stationed in Mastung, a town situated to the south of Quetta. Mastung was also severely damaged during the earthquake. Skrine, who held the post of political agent in the Balauchistan administration, was sleeping in 'the Residency', which collapsed around him (Skrine, 1936, 414-15). The palace of the local princely ruler, the Khan of Kalat, was also severely damaged. The death toll for the town was reported as being over 1,700 (Carayannis). Skrine quickly involved himself in the rescue operations.

Accompanied by his Indian servants he travelled to Quetta to get aid. However, on witnessing the devastation in that city, he returned to Mastung and worked to restore order there. As a result of his relief work he was awarded with an O.B.E (Stewart, 1989, 172).

The Quetta earthquake prompted a new wave of architectural design in India. In earthquake-prone areas new buildings were constructed using reinforced concrete (Gun, 2007, 341). In Quetta itself new buildings were also generally built as single-storey dwellings (Brown).

## Analysis

Skrine's footage begins on the morning of the earthquake, shortly before he headed out for aid. He later recalled that before setting off to Quetta: 'I "shot" the ruined Residency and other scenes with my cine-camera, which to my great joy I had discovered undamaged in the porch, with nearly 50 feet of unexposed film' (Skrine, 1936, 417). His footage records his journey to the capital city, the devastation he witnessed there, and the scenes of Mastung upon his return. It then goes on to record later stages of the relief operation, culminating with scenes in Quetta four months after the earthquake.

Skrine manages to capture a wide range of material. He shows the damage wrought on a variety of buildings, including government homes, law courts and the shopping district. He also shows the earthquake's effect on the physical environment, filming the scars caused by rock fall on Mount Chiltan. There is also much human interest footage. He films Indians drinking a comforting cup of tea among the ruins of their destroyed home; he records shopkeepers rummaging for possessions among their ruined stores; and there is footage of Sikhs constructing a pyre for the cremation of their dead. There is also some disturbing material. Indian boy scouts and rovers can be seen retrieving crushed bodies from the debris. And then there is a scene in which an impoverished local approaches the Khan of Khat; as she begs before him he pushes her aside, and as a consequence she falls to the ground.

Skrine's film is more sympathetic towards the local people. Although in his recollections of the earthquake he talks of 'marauding bands which roamed around the countryside' (Skrine, 1936, 420), in the film itself, where he features tribesmen, his title card states only that they are 'fleeing southwards from the stricken area'. He also films a tribal village. Here a title card starkly records: 'Dingra Village: 140 inhabitants 110 deaths'.

Skrine's film of the Quetta Earthquake provides valuable documentation. Unfortunately, he is an unskilled camera operator. It is to be expected that his camerawork would be a little haphazard on the morning of the earthquake; nevertheless, throughout the film his control of the camera remains unsteady. He also frames things poorly and pans too quickly across the material that he wishes to capture. As a result there is little sense of focus in his scenes. The footage also generally begins and ends too abruptly. The film is in its original, apparently unedited, chronological order, which Skrine punctuates with the use of title cards. These do describe what is taking place on screen, but he fails to disclose any personal involvement in the footage that is taking place. The title cards would have

been more effective if we had learned that the ruined Residency is where he had been staying; that the track in Mastung is being cleared so that he can get to Quetta for aid; that the scene of the damaged culvert forms part of his journey; and so on. To be best appreciated the film needs to be viewed in conjunction with Skrine's recollections of the event in the *Geographical Journal*.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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**Film Number** JFU 416

**Film Title** **REOCCUPATION OF THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS**  
[BRITISH ARMY OPERATIONS IN SOUTH EAST ASIA  
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR] [Allocated series]

**Web Address** <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2910>

**Production Date** 7/10/1945  
8/10/1945  
9/10/1945  
10/10/1945

**Production Country** GB

**Maker**

**Production Company** SEAC Film Unit

### **Synopsis**

In the Andaman Islands, after more than three and a half years of Japanese occupation, troops of 116th Indian Infantry Brigade make an amphibious landing at Port Blair to take the surrender of the Japanese garrison, while Civil Affairs troops see to the welfare of the population. Shot on 7 October 1945: footage from a landing craft approaching the shore showing two Landing Craft Assaults (LCAs) and larger transport vessels on the horizon. An LCA ahead, with a Royal Marine captain in right foreground with binoculars, looking towards land. Approaching Port Blair; local people can be seen on the waterfront. The troops on the cameraman's LCA disembark and a number of locals help the men ashore. More men disembarking from landing craft. Troops crossing open ground. Locals line a road; in the distance troops appear to be running with their backs to the camera. Out of focus crowd shot. Group of civilians including children. Shot on 7 October 1945: troops lying prone. Wide shot of troops, probably of 8th Battalion 6th Rajputana Rifles, on open ground with civilians amongst them. Rear-quarter medium close-up of an Indian soldier with rifle. Ships on the horizon and palm trees. Troops filing across open ground.

Local people. Line of troops heading into undergrowth. Series of shots of cheering locals in the bazaar at Port Blair. Small group of Japanese naval troops. Crowd along a road. Looking up at two civilian women on a balcony. Lieutenant-Commander Takano, staff captain to Vice-Admiral Hara Teizo (commanding Japanese naval forces in the Andaman Islands and Japanese military governor) arrives on the quayside for surrender discussions. Silhouetted shot of Takano alone on the quayside. Landing Craft Infantry (Large) (LCI(L)) 310 berthing. Men disembarking from LCI(L) 310. Japanese watching. A smiling young girl watches from behind a pillar. Scenic shot showing a troopship (probably *HMT Dilwara*) and a sloop (possibly *HMIS Narbada*) in Port Blair harbour, taken from the roof of the Cellular Jail. A party of civilian administrators are shown around the jail. A line of Japanese sailors on the quayside awaiting instructions; the man nearest camera turns and salutes. A Japanese naval rating meets the British officer (Captain E R Jolly, of Wicklow, Eire) commanding troops on Ross Island, a small defended island three quarters of a mile from Port Blair; one man in the group is wearing the patch of Combined Operations. Party walks up a steep hill and is saluted by the Japanese commander of the Ross Island detachment. Two Japanese naval troops talking with Captain J Cameron of Edinburgh, an interpreter. Group of Japanese troops leaving their billet.

Shot on 8 October 1945: interior; Captains Jolly and Cameron discuss defensive positions with the Japanese commanding officer, apparently a merchant seaman torpedoed off the Andamans. Four Japanese troops run to join a party of other Japanese, disarmed and awaiting internment. Captain S Campbell talks to Able Seaman Denis Whitehouse of Bromley, Kent. Interned Japanese troops carrying crates and kitbags at the docks; Landing Craft Tank 7023 can be seen moored behind.

Shot on 9 October 1945, at approximately 1000 hours: Japanese Army and Navy delegates arrive to sign a formal surrender at the Gymkhana Ground, Port Blair; one of their escorts is enormously tall and they await the arrival of the British and Indian delegation. Brigadier J A Salomons, commander of 116th Indian Infantry Brigade and officer commanding land forces Andaman and Nicobar Islands, arrives and inspects a guard of honour; some of the troops appear to be wearing 'Rajput' shoulder titles. Salomons takes his seat and reads the terms of surrender. Seated Japanese naval officer, Vice Admiral Hara Teizo. Seated Japanese army officer, Major-General Tamenori Sato. Japanese interpreter reading the terms. Vice Admiral Hara signing the instrument of surrender and affixing his seal. The British delegation, with Salomons in the centre, flanked by the Chief Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Mr Noel K Patterson, Indian Civil Service) and Captain J H Blair and an unnamed brigade major. Major-General Sato signs the instrument. Wide shot of the sports ground. Allied spectators (soldiers and sailors). Civilians and assorted servicemen watching. Salomons signing. View over his shoulder. Wider shot. Japanese

Navy officers putting on their white gloves. Teizo approaches the Allied delegation's desk, salutes, and places his sword on the table. Closer shot shows the junior Japanese naval officer saluting and placing his sword carefully on the table before marching away. Sato surrenders his sword. Japanese delegation marches off. British delegation walk towards a pavilion with a very large Union flag flying. Crowd dispersing (short section here fogged). Nurses walking away. Patterson inspects one of the swords; he unsheaths it and a British officer (mostly out of shot) tests the edge. Nurses examining a sword. Close-up of the instrument of surrender, with signatures in English and the Japanese officers' family seals. A body of Japanese troops. Japanese officer giving instructions. Japanese vehicles driving off; they fly white surrender pennants. Japanese weapons (tripod-mounted medium machine guns with canvas covers) are unloaded from lorries, wide shot of lorries being unloaded.

Shot on 10 October 1945: large group of civilians waiting to receive rations and vaccinations from Civil Affairs Service personnel. A queue of mothers and children files past camera. Civil Affairs Service personnel issuing rations in square metal tins and apparently containing 14 days food for one person (rice, salt, tea, sugar, powdered milk etc). A small child, crying, holding its mother's leg. A man carrying a tin of rations on his shoulder receives an injection. A small boy is injected. A captain of the Indian Army Medical Corps injects a woman. A toddler receives an injection. Civilians carrying their rations on their heads. High shot looking over the waiting crowd.

## Notes

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands were occupied by the Japanese from March 1942. They had at one point been considered for capture (Operation Buccaneer) as a jumping-off point for an amphibious assault against Rangoon.

The Cellular Jail was constructed between 1896 and 1906, and could house 698 prisoners each in a separate and isolated cell, giving it its name. The Andaman Islands were used as a penal colony after the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and housed political prisoners during the Indian independence movement.

The dopesheet states that Able Seaman Whitehouse was the only British prisoner of war on Ross Island, having spent ninety days adrift in a lifeboat after being torpedoed by a Japanese submarine on the *SS Woolgar*. However, other sources suggest that the *D/S Woolgar*, a Norwegian-operated vessel built in Sunderland in 1914, was sunk by Japanese aircraft. She was attacked on 7 March 1942, 150 miles off Tjilatjap, and went down in 12 minutes. Six men, including Whitehouse, survived 88 days in a lifeboat, although one died ten days after reaching land.

The cameraman's dopesheet also remarks that 'Jap Lt-Comdr and Staff Capt in roll 3 were escorted to quayside by the cameraman with much bowing and saluting. Co-operation by Jap Navy personnel was absolute in the extreme'. Such behaviour by Japanese personnel was common throughout southeast Asia following the surrender, and it often puzzled Allied troops who had experienced their suicidal ferocity in battle.

After the War, both Vice Admiral Teizo and Major-General Sato were accused of war crimes. Teizo was acquitted in a case relating to the execution of nine Burmese Andaman islanders, while Sato was executed for involvement in the killing of a number of Burmese civilians, including women and children, who were attempting to escape in a stolen Japanese boat.

For useful additional coverage in stills, see IWM photo references below, taken by Sergeant Lemon. Lemon's captions name the brigade major as R B Williams, and other members of the Japanese delegation as Staff Captain Shimazaki and Lieutenant-Colonel Tazawa.

In all, a remarkable piece of film, with an interesting mix of military, political and human interest, and consistently well shot.

## Context

*Reoccupation of the Andaman Islands* consists of silent black and white rushes of the 116<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade shot by Sergeant E. E. Miller, a combat cameraman of the British Army's South East Asia Command (SEAC) Army Film and Photographic Unit. The footage, shot between 7 and 10 October 1945, covers the surrender of Japanese forces on the Andaman Islands.

The Andamans are a group of archipelagic islands in the Bay of Bengal which now form part of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Union Territory of India. The island's geographical location – 800 miles from the nearest Indian port – influenced their use as a penal colony (see 'Andaman District'). The British government proposed the construction of a prison on the islands in 1855. Although work was delayed due to the Indian Rebellion of 1857, this rebellion also encouraged the use of the islands as a penal settlement. Prominent members of the independence movement were subsequently housed in the solitary confinement of the island's Cellular Jail. Indians imprisoned there referred to the island and its prison as 'Kala Pani' (Black Water), also the name of a 1996 film about the prison. Following VJ Day, the Government of India declared that its first priority for the islands would be the abolition of the penal settlement. *The Times* reported that there was 'a good deal of political prejudice against the settlement' and that 'nationalist politicians object to the Government's having at their disposal an oversea [sic] settlement to which awkward customers



could be removed' (*The Times*, 3 September 1945, 3). The penal colony was closed on 15 August 1947. Cellular Jail now serves as a museum to the independence movement.

The Andaman Islands were the subject of the first Japanese assault on Indian territory during World War II (on 24 February 1942) and represented the only part of this territory to be occupied by Japanese troops. They were captured by the Japanese on 23 March 1942 following the evacuation of 'a considerable proportion of the population of the islands, including women and children and a number of convicts' (*The Times*, 26 March 1942, 4). It was estimated, however, that 4000 prisoners remained (*The Times*, 3 September 1945, 3). The military correspondent for *The Times* reported that this exit 'could scarcely have been avoided', the geographical location of the islands meant that 'they would be very much easier for the Japanese to attack than for us to defend'. He also conceded that although 'obviously unwelcome' the capture of the islands 'would appear to be a far less serious danger than that which threatens India from Burma' (*The Times*, 26 March 1942, 4). The islands held a strategic position for Japanese naval forces and were used as a submarine and seaplane base.

During the latter stages of the War food, clothing and medical supplies on the island became straitened. It was nevertheless October 1945 before Allied troops reclaimed the islands. In the meantime South East Asia Command was 'engaged on larger and more urgent tasks which apparently absorb[ed] all available shipping' (*The Times*, 3 September 1945, 3), including the re-occupation of Singapore, Britain's primary strategic objective in the entire southeast Asian theatre.

### **Analysis**

Although *Reoccupation of the Andaman Islands* is comprised of rushes, various scenes betray a foreknowledge of their eventual sequencing if the story was later to be selected for screening in a newsreel or documentary. The opening footage of the forces re-occupying the island includes establishing shots of the arrival of the troops, followed by the reaction of the islanders, and then the advance of the troops into the mainland. The extensive footage of the formal surrender ceremony is also framed for storytelling purposes. Each stage of this elaborate procedure is captured, with particular attention being paid to the surrender document (filmed in close-up) and the handover of traditional samurai swords.

There are three main protagonists in the footage: the Allied troops, the Japanese, and the islanders. Each is treated differently by the cameraman. The Allied troops are usually filmed from a distance and they are rarely individualised. The footage reveals an efficient, collaborative army unit calmly

going about its business. The Japanese army is shown as being a more overtly ritualised force (particularly during the surrender ceremony). It is also depicted as being humiliated (there are scenes that feature Japanese troops carrying heavy loads while under Allied supervision). In the scenes that feature Japanese forces it is their response that the cameraman prioritises. A pensive Lieutenant Commander Takano is depicted surveying the waterfront; at the harbour Japanese soldiers are lined up before the camera and one of them salutes; in negotiations with interpreter Captain J. Cameron it is the respectful Japanese officers who are monitored.

Sergeant Miller also appears keen to capture the reactions of the local islanders. They are often filmed face-on and are accorded medium-range and close-up shots. There are repeated scenes of the islanders cheering. This footage could be intercut with the arrival of the liberating troops, corresponding with a report in *The Times* that lauds the ‘overwhelming welcome from crowds lining the beaches’ (*The Times*, 10 October 1945, 4). However, as the dopesheets reveal, one point of origin for this euphoria is merely the presence of the cameraman.

The food relief and inoculations given to the islanders provide a positive story for the cameraman to capture. This footage also shows an awareness of its possible eventual assembly. There are long-range shots of a queue of locals, medium-range shots of civilian affairs personnel carrying the vaccinations, a close-up of a vaccinated child in tears, and to conclude there is familiar footage of women and children carrying their rations on their heads.

**Richard Osborne (March 2009)**

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- ‘Future of the Andamans’, *The Times*, 3 September 1945, 3.

CBA 200

CATALOGUE NUMBER

ITEM NAME:

**REPORT FROM BURMA**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5721>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1945

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

New Realm

DESCRIPTION:

An interim report on the progress of the 14th Army offensive in Burma. Description of the logistic problems of the Burmese campaign, caused by mountainous jungle, the Chindwin river and heavy monsoon rainfall. Illustrations of transport by porters, mules, barges and aeroplanes, and of the use of elephants in engineering work. An account of the battle for Kennedy Peak (stock shot compilation) and detailed coverage of the building of the Chindwin Bridge (the largest floating Bailey bridge of the war); mention of the next tasks ahead for the 14th Army. Commentary by an officer from the Burma front.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Remarks: oversimplified - better accounts of all topics in the final report BURMA VICTORY.

Title: REPORT FROM BURMA [Main]

Colour: B&W Sound: comopt

Soundtrack: English

Main title: English

Subtitles: None

Sponsor: Ministry of Information

Production company: New Realm

Production individual: Cummins, Sylvia K

Production individual: Burgess, George

Production cast: Owen, Frank (Major)

Production Date: 1945

Production Country: GB

Description: An interim report on the progress of the Fourteenth Army offensive in ... Film

Number:

Film:CBA 200

Notes: Remarks: oversimplified - better accounts of all topics in the final r... References: N/A

Related Items: N/A Access Conditions: LPU Film/Video Format: P 1/35/N Number of Reels: 1

Footage: 1093 ft Running time: 12 mins

### *Context*

The war in Burma was the longest British campaign of World War II, lasting from the invasion of the country by the Japanese in 1941 until the overall surrender by Japan in August 1945. It was also among the most complicated. Burma represented the furthest westward advance of Japanese forces into Britain's South-East Asian Empire. The British fought in Burma for two main reasons: to prevent any Japanese advance towards neighbouring India; and as part of their campaign to regain captured territories. However, there was in addition a largely American-backed campaign in Burma, the aim of which was to keep the supply route to China open, thus encouraging that nation in its fight against the Japanese.

The British strategy drew in military forces from throughout the Empire. Largely officered by the British, the campaign featured soldiers from the UK, Nepal, Africa and India, as well as from Burma itself. Troops from the sub-continent were predominant. Louis Allen has stated that it was the 'The Indian Army [who] saw to it that the Empire in Burma was preserved' (Allen, 1984, 632). He adds that 'the Indian Army was not serving its own people, nor the interests of the people across whose territory the war was fought' (Allen, 1984, 634). The people of Burma in fact had divergent interests. Japanese state-building achieved its greatest success here. Ashley Jackson has argued that among the dominant ethnic group, the Burmans, some 'were actively anti-British and willing to work with the Japanese' (Jackson, 2006, 386). He counters that other ethnic groups, including the Karens, Chins, Kachines and Nagas, 'were loyal to the British, or opposed to Japanese or Burman influence, and therefore prepared to support them' (Jackson, 2006, 386).

The Burmese campaigns faced several difficulties. As well as fighting the Japanese, the troops had to battle against the jungle terrain of the country, its tropical diseases and its harsh weather conditions. The Burmese monsoon season, which lasts from October-March, was initially avoided. However, in the last years of the campaign Allied troops advanced in the heavy downpour. In parts of Burma there is an average rainfall of 200 inches each year (Allen, 1984, 8).

As the war in Burma neared its conclusion, attempts were made to produce a combined British and American film of the campaign. However, the divergent aims of these countries led to the project breaking down. Instead two feature-length histories were made. Both attempted to tell the whole story of the Burmese war, but portrayed it in a partisan manner. The British film, *Burma Victory* (1945), focussed primarily on the re-conquest of Burma. The American film, *Stilwell Road* (1945), was centred on the completion of the land supply route to China.

This short film, *Report from Burma*, was produced by the company New Realm for the British Ministry of Information. It concentrates solely on the British campaign and was shot in 1945 when the Japanese were firmly in retreat. Its main campaign sequences cover the Battle for Kennedy Peak and the bridging of the Chindwin River. In its conclusion the film anticipates the advance on Rangoon, where the final battles were fought and the Japanese surrendered the territory to the British. Reflecting this bias, it was a British audience for whom the film was intended (see *MFB*, 1945, 64).

### *Analysis*

*Report from Burma* provides interesting points of contrast with *Burma Victory* and *Stilwell Road*, the two most well-known film documents of the Burma campaign. It is more fragmentary and localised, and it does not offer the broad overview that is provided in the other films. Curiously, however, in some ways it can be said to provide a more rounded picture of Burma and of the battle to recapture it.

*Report from Burma* is careful to outline its military credentials and its authenticity. An opening title card informs us that the commentary is spoken by Major Frank Owen, and the film then begins with a separate commentator, who informs us that Owen is editor of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army's newspaper, SEAC, and that he recorded his commentary in London before returning to the Burma Front. Here, we are informed, 'he is in daily contact with the serving men'. Nevertheless, the film does not attempt to outline the complicated strategy of the Burmese War. Unlike *Burma Victory* and *Stilwell Road*, there is no use of maps to illustrate the separate passages of the campaign; instead there are just two brief summations of the soldiers' positions and of how well they are doing against the Japanese.

This 'report' appears to have been largely determined by the film material that was available. As much screen time is given to the construction work of elephants as there is to the battle for Kennedy Peak. Owen's commentary, by and large, reflects directly upon what is taking place on screen. Ultimately, the film comes across as a series of snapshots; a feeling that is reinforced by the fact that its background music does not build from scene to scene.

The soldier's perspective provides differences from *Burma Victory* and *Stilwell Road*. The same footage of the monsoon rains can be seen in each of these films, but it is dealt with most stoically here. Owen even concedes that there is one good thing about the rain: 'it's warm'. In addition, the film has a different approach to the polyglot nature of the Allied troops. Both *Burma Victory* and *Stilwell Road* have set-piece sequences that highlight the many nations who are fighting under one banner. It is *Report from Burma*, however, that has the most extensive footage of Indian troops operating in the field. Curiously, the nationality of the troops is one of the few visual elements that Owen fails to address directly in his commentary. There are positive aspects to this. The other films both stress the Anglo-American dominated structure of command. This film, in contrast, does not depict any of the military leaders and instead shows Indian soldiers working in self-contained units. On the other hand, Owen's commentary is reductive. In one segment we see a group of Indian soldiers advance, but he describes this as being 'the first British wave'. At the close of the film there is a section that features troops of different nationalities. Owen does acknowledge their racial composition here, stating that they are 'British, Indian and African'; however, in the next sentence their triumphs are described as being 'the mighty military victories of the British'.

Finally, *Report from Burma* can be differentiated from the other two films in its portrayal of Burma itself. *Burma Victory* and *Stilwell Road* portray Burma as a hostile country. This film, in contrast, shows the army working with the land, animals and people of Burma. We learn that the country's waterways have been used to ferry goods to the soldiers; here we are shown medium close-ups of the locals who have helped to undertake this task. The elephants of Burma are described as being the soldiers' 'friend' and worth their weight in gold; again, the film features the locals who are helping to harness this aid. Similar attention is paid to the tribes of the Chin hills who have been enlisted to help collect the drops of airborne supplies.

**Richard Osborne (July 2009)**

#### *Works cited*

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Jackson, Ashley, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (Hambledon: Continuum, 2006).  
'Report from Burma', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 12:133/144 (1945), 64.

Titles

## **ROLLICKING RAJAH**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/481>

Technical Data

\* Year:

1914 (circa)

\* Colour:

Black/White

\* Sound:

Silent

Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

Great Britain

\* Production Company

Hepworth Manufacturing Company

## **Synopsis**

A man dressed as an Indian rajah sings while women dance around him. He sings again at a party and the women dance. The same women dressed in Indian costumes dance around him as he sings (207ft).

## **Colonial Film Synopsis**

Title card: “Vivaphone” Film. Title card: ‘The Rollicking Rajah’. First verse and chorus of ‘The Rolling Rajah’. The film set is a city street in Britain. White man dressed as an Indian rajah dances and sings centre screen, either side of him are two dancers who are dressed as his oriental guards. Six women, wearing European-styled coats and hats enter from either side of the screen; they dance with the rajah, admire his clothes, and bow to him and salute. Second verse and chorus of ‘The Rolling Rajah’. The film set is the interior of an elegant British residence. The women are now in dresses and are drinking wine with the rajah; also present in the scene is a rotund European butler. Rajah heads centre screen and continues with his song; the women and butler dance behind him. The women gently caress the rajah; the butler makes a motion to kiss him. Third verse and chorus. The film set is the interior of a palace in India. Rajah is sat down, he continues his song; the guards are present either side of him. Girls enter from rear of set, dressed in oriental costumes. Two of the girls sit on the rajah’s lap, while the others gather round him. They stand, followed by the rajah, and circle and bow in supplication before him.



### *Context*

Cecil Hepworth had the longest career of any of Britain's pioneer filmmakers. He produced his first films in 1899, and in 1904 formed the Hepworth Manufacturing Company, with Monty Wicks and H.V. Lawley, which remained in business until 1924. Rachael Low has argued that during the years of its existence the company gave the British film industry 'its greatest and sometimes only cause for pride' (Low, 1949, 107)

The Hepworth Manufacturing Company's house style was 'based on simple stories told with high photographic quality' (Brown). Their output included melodramas, comedies, literary adaptations, scenics and travel films. The company was among the first to understand the value of using film stars, including the canine star of their first noted picture, *Rescued by Rover* (1905), and actors such as Harry Buss, Alma Taylor and Chrissie White, who were each featured in several of their films.

The Hepworth Manufacturing Company was among those that experimented in combining sound with pictures. In 1907 they introduced the 'Vivaphone', an electromagnetic system, which synchronised the projector with a gramophone (Talbot, 1970, 182). It was among the more successful of such systems and was praised in *Bioscope* for being as 'near perfection as human ingenuity can make it' (*Bioscope*, 13 July 1911, 57). It was also less expensive than others on the market (Low, 1949, 265).

*The Rollicking Rajah* is one of Hepworth's 'singing pictures'. It is comprised of a performance of the song of the same name, which was written by lyricist Arthur J. Mills and composer Bennett Scott, one of the most prolific music hall songwriting teams of the period ('A. J. Mills (1872-1919)'). In March 1914 *The Bioscope* reported that the music hall artists Tom Powers and Florence Turner had recorded a number of songs and dances for Hepworth's Vivaphone system, and it is possible that Powers is the lead actor in this film. The journal also noted that the Hepworth Manufacturing Co 'had an unusually large number of orders to install their Vivaphone singing pictures in all parts of the country' (*The Bioscope*, 19 March 1914, 1257).

*The Rollicking Rajah* concerns a fictional Indian prince – the Rajah of Ranjipoo – who 'has his fling' while visiting England. The Indian Princes were thought of as being synonymous with wealth; Ann Morrow writes that 'Carpets of ivory, pearls of gold, coffers of diamonds and rubies, emeralds as big as goose eggs, jewels designed by Cartier were taken for granted' (Morrow, 1986, ix). In this film the

Rajah's wealth and charm fascinate 'the lovely dancing girls', who in turn fascinate him, and he eventually decides to take one as his bride. Barbara N. Ramusack has stated that during the British colonial period marriage between Indian Princes and western women was looked upon with disfavour by both Britons and Indians; she notes that the subject was 'disparaged in official discourse and literature' (Ramusack, 2004, 135). Although these marriages were also considered to be of dubious legality, Ramusack notes three prominent unions that did take place (Ramusack, 2004, 136). It is possible that the inspiration for 'The Rollicking Rajah' was the 1910 marriage between Maharaja Jagatjit Singh of Kapurthala and the Spanish dancer, Anita Delgrada, a *cause célèbre* in its day (Vázquez de Gey).

### *Analysis*

The roots of *The Rollicking Rajah* as both a song and presentation lie in music hall theatre. As such, the piece obeys the bawdy conventions of the genre, and it displays a greater understanding of rollicking than it does of rajahs themselves. The film is patterned after the song that it features. It runs for the length of the number, and its three acts correspond with its three verses and choruses. It is also filmed in the manner of a music hall performance. It is shot from one camera position, and the singer commands the front of the stage addressing the audience directly. One filmic convention is the use of cross-fades to segue between each scene. The settings of each scene correspond with what could be achieved by using props and backgrounds in a theatre production, for example drapes and potted flowers are employed to signify a British country house, and in the next scenes these are replaced with animal-skin rugs and potted plants to signify India.

Rachael Low has argued that the music hall conventions of early sound pictures meant that they remained 'stationary' at a point when contemporary silent pictures were experimenting with editing and the multiple positioning of cameras (Low, 1949, 266). However, Simon Brown believes that, in general, Hepworth was uninterested in the development of film language. He states that his films continued to feature 'frontal staging with action played out in pantomimic gestures in a single long-shot tableaux' and that, as such, films such as *The Rollicking Rajah* began to look 'more and more old fashioned' (Brown).

In both the song and the film much is made of the Prince's wealth. He is noted as being a 'multi-millionaire' who wears diamonds and rubies in his turban. The lyrics of the song state that it is these gems that attract the dancing ladies. In the film itself these riches are portrayed using budget-price costumes and props. Moreover, the girls are not shown to be mere money-grabbers. Instead, there is

mutual attraction between the Rajah and the dancing girls: the girls flirt with the Rajah, while the Rajah invites them to sit on his lap.

The film is not censorious of the relationship between the Rajah and the dancing girls: instead the subject is treated as an object of mildly bawdy fun (there is even a moment when a British butler makes a motion to kiss the Rajah on the cheek). This playfulness is made possible due to the fact that the Rajah is clearly a white man in blackface (who was also possibly a familiar actor to the cinema audience). Moreover, while obviously dressed up as an oriental character, he bears little resemblance to an actual Indian prince: there is no attempt at authenticity in the clothing or jewellery. The minstrelsy enables the actors to broach a taboo subject while avoiding actual miscegenation. It also frees the protagonists to act in an outré manner, and it should be considered to what extent the filmmakers were led by this basic impulse of music hall theatre, and to what extent they were led by an urge to disparage Anglo-Indian relationships.

**Richard Osborne (April 2010)**

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<b>Film Number</b>	ADM 1767
<b>Film Title</b>	<b>ROYAL NAVY MAKES EFFORTS TO RESTORE ELECTRIC POWER IN HONG KONG</b> [BRITISH NAVAL OPERATIONS IN THE FAR EAST] [series, allocated]
<b>Web Address</b>	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5261">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5261</a>
<b>Production Date</b>	1945
<b>Production Country</b>	GB
<b>Production Sponsor</b>	[Admiralty]

### Synopsis

- I. Sequence showing Kowloon power station, and lines of coolie women carrying logs to the operative boiler. H.A.L.S onto a second power station in a built up area - Taikoo (?)
- II. Miscellaneous scenes in Hong Kong. RN officers and men shopping in a street market. Shoeshine boy at work. Group of three sailors, each in a rickshaw - a rather pointed contrast here between the well-fed, indeed beefy ratings, and their rather emaciated looking bearers – the camera excites a certain amount of interest from both spectators and subjects. Crowded street scene – passing Chinese look or wave to the camera. A group of three Lieutenants do some shopping.
- III. Interior of submarine's battery compartment, and CU of Petty Officer at generator control board.
- IV. Ship at sea. CU of a man sitting by the guard rail - he is wearing shorts and smoking, and writes a letter, the pad on his knee. A stiff breeze is blowing

### Notes

Summary: In the first days of the liberation of Hong Kong, Victoria was very short of electric power. The Kowloon power station was running, with one boiler on logs giving about 150 kw. The Japanese had taken up the land line from Taikoo power station and laid it across the harbour to connect to the Kowloon station. Two submarines went alongside in the dockyard to provide

additional power for the island.

<b>Film/Video Format</b>	P 1/35/N
<b>Number of Reels</b>	1
<b>Black &amp; White/Colour</b>	B&W
<b>Silent/Sound</b>	Silent
<b>Language of Soundtrack</b>	None
<b>Language of Main Titles</b>	None
<b>Language of Subtitles</b>	None
<b>Context Date</b>	1945
<b>Index: Objects</b>	reconstruction, Chinese
<b>Index: Places</b>	Hong Kong
<b>Acquisition Method</b>	Transfer
<b>Acquired from</b>	Admiralty
<b>Access Conditions</b>	IWM
<b>Rights</b>	Crown
<b>Date and Cataloguer</b>	7/1986 NAP 20/04/2007 JCK WR UPU 27/4/2007 JCK PUB 29/1/2009 JCK WR

*Context*

Frank Welsh has argued that ‘The great achievement of Japanese rule in Hong Kong was to convince the Chinese population that, by comparison with that of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, British rule was both benign and competent’ (Welsh, 1993, 420-21). Following the surrender of British colonial officials on 25 December 1941 the Japanese ruled Hong Kong for a period of three years and eight months. During this time the territory was subject to martial law. It has been estimated that over ten thousand Hong Kong civilians were executed (Welsh, 1993, 421). A further 7000 British residents were held in prisoner-of-war or internment camps. The Japanese commandeered or destroyed properties in order to serve their military interests. They also assumed control of trading activities, replacing the Hong Kong dollar with the military yen. The majority of factories were taken over by the Japanese. There were shortages of fuel and public transport, and utilities routinely failed. Allied air attacks compounded Hong Kong’s straitened circumstances. A shortage of food, housing and medical provisions encouraged a Japanese policy of repatriation. The population of Hong Kong declined from 1.6 million in 1941 to 600,000 in 1945 as residents were forcibly returned to mainland China (Bradsher, 18 April 2005).

There was disagreement among the Allied nations regarding who should assume control of Hong Kong following the end of the war. The Chinese government regarded Hong Kong as rightfully theirs. In addition, they believed that they should receive territorial concessions as a reward for their participation in the war (Welsh, 1993, 422-23). The American government, particularly during the period of Roosevelt’s presidency, was largely supportive of Chinese claims. There was also a belief in the Foreign Office of the British government that Hong Kong should no longer be part of the Empire. The Colonial Office and Winston Churchill disagreed, however, and support for the British case increased as the weaknesses of the then Chinese regime became apparent. Eventually Hong Kong returned to British rule. The American command in the Far East gave British forces permission to retake the territory. The incumbent American president, Harry S. Truman, meanwhile assured China that this action did not reflect future US policy on Hong Kong (Welsh, 1993, 430).

Philip Snow claims that during the scenes of liberation by the British, the ‘White Sun’ nationalist flag ‘outnumbered the Union Jacks by four to one’ (Snow, 2004, 259). Frank Welsh believes, however, that for Hong Kong’s residents ‘practical difficulties’ were more pressing than their political concerns (Welsh, 1993, 432). The new military administration worked quickly. Free food supplies

were provided and over 30,000 coolies were employed to help repair the damage wrought by the Japanese. The Hongkong and Shanghai Bank restored Hong Kong's currency and provided funds to enable public utilities to function. It is Steve Tsang's belief that the restoration of British administration in Hong Kong was the 'most shining example of all the territories liberated from the Japanese' (Tsang, 1997, 53). Welsh concurs, stating that the speed and success of this post-war readjustment was 'unparalleled elsewhere' (Welsh, 1993, 433). He argues that, as a result, 'Confidence in British rule, shattered by the experiences of 1941, was regained' (Welsh, 1993, 433). Snow, however, is more cautious. He remarks that 'Behind all the panoply of their re-entry, behind the grim grey warships and shining white uniforms, the British rulers of Hong Kong were feeble as never before' (Snow, 2004, 264-65). He further argues that patrolling the streets and shepherding Japanese troops into POW camps was the limit of the military's power; meanwhile the urban areas of Hong Kong 'lay prostrate to the mercy of Triad gangs', while in the countryside 'the British had no kind of a grip at all' (Snow, 2004, 265).

### *Analysis*

The allocated title for this film, 'Royal Navy Makes Efforts To Restore Electric Power in Hong Kong', is not entirely fitting. The film is made up of a variety of scenes captured by a naval cameraman, and only the opening segment is concerned with the attempt to restore power at the Kowloon Power Station. There is little direct evidence here of the Navy's work. The cameraman frames the two power stations that were involved in the operation and we have a glimpse of a naval ship in the background of one of the scenes. There is also evidence of some of the bombing that had been inflicted on Hong Kong. However, it is the Chinese residents of Hong Kong who are to be seen carrying out the main labour. Men and women, some wearing coolie hats, are shown transporting logs of various sizes from a yard near one of the factories.

The Royal Navy is, however, seen to be making an effort in their leisure activities. The majority of the film is taken up with officers' excursions in the city. Several scenes show navy personnel shopping in the city's markets. Here the priorities of the cameraman are clear. Although the streets are often crowded with local people it is the naval officers that he focuses on. This becomes apparent in a scene where a panned movement of the camera sweeps towards a group of locals. These people are at first attracted to the camera, but they move quickly out of the way when they realise that it has been tracking the movements of some officers. The film concludes with a segment filmed in the engine room of a submarine, followed by one that shows officers relaxing on the deck of a warship. Thus it is not focussed primarily on the effects of the war on the city of Hong Kong or

on its residents. In fact, the scenes are somewhat random and the film would require a great deal of editing and/or compilation with other footage to serve any narrative function.

This film does nonetheless remain of value. It captures the contrast between the liberating forces and the residents of Hong Kong. There is a clear difference between the well-fed and well-dressed naval officers and the bare-chested rickshaw bearers who have to carry them around the city. There is a similar contrast in a scene that depicts some smartly dressed officers among a group of boys who wear clothes that are in near urchin-condition. The contrast grows wider still as one of the boys provides an officer with a shoeshine. The officer appears at ease during this process and makes an attempt to engage with the surrounding children.

Although the footage of market streets can seem prolonged, it does have some variety within it. There are gradations between the types of stall and the types of people who are shopping at them. In some areas the shoppers and the stall-holders appear to be more prosperous; correspondingly there are more locals in western-styled clothing in these scenes. There are also some shopping areas that are male-dominated while in others more females are present.

Although the cameraman of this film has not prioritised Hong Kong's people, a good amount of local life has been captured. Moreover, he has captured locals who are interested in being filmed. The people of Hong Kong gaze at the camera, even if the camera's gaze has not been directed at them. The way in which the British officers register the camera's presence is different. They try to appear off-hand and at ease but commonly come across as being self-conscious, a result of their awareness that they are the proposed subject of this film.

**Richard Osborne (September 2009)**

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**ROYAL VISIT TO INDIA AND NEPAL**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/207>  
 Title Ref: Sift 3846  
 Director:  
 Prod. Country : GB  
 Year: 1922  
 1st Release: 1922  
 Prodn. Company:  
 Notes: This is part of OUR GREATEST AMBASSADOR, which is probably  
 WITH H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES THROUGH INDIA AND  
 BURMA (Stoll Film Company, 1922).  
 Release Country: GB  
 Format: 35  
 Run Time (Mins):  
 Length: 504 Feet 154 Metres  
 Colour Code: B  
 Colour System:  
 Sound System: SLNT  
 Language:  
 Dubbed: N  
 Subtitled: N  
 Additional Credits  
 Photography TAYLOR-WOODS, George

**Synopsis**

A record of Edward, Prince of Wales' visit to India and Nepal, 1921. Prince at Calcutta; the Malakand Pass; and tiger hunting in Nepal.

No main title. A building outlined in lights (8). Arrival of the Prince in open landau at the Madian, Calcutta. He alights from the landau and greets the Indian dignitaries (17-57). The Prince, flanked by the Viceroy and his wife (?) on a raised and covered dais (60). Indian dancing girls perform (72). LS over plain to mountains and Malakand Pass (90-122). Entrance to Malakand Fort. A Gurkha guard is on duty; other Gurkhas enter the fort (136). Exterior view of the fort and entrance; camera follows a man carrying kindling on his head as he walks past the entrance along the fort wall and down a slope (179); beyond the slope can be seen a large, low, rocky hill with watchtowers at either

end guarding the road to Chak Dara [Chakdarra] (188-209). LS pan right Chak Dara Fort (219-225). The royal motorcade crosses the border into Nepal and is greeted by men throwing rice and flowers, a ceremony accorded only to royalty (237-245). The Prince inspects a Nepalese guard of honour (248-281). A tiger shoot on elephants: starting off on the hunt, a group of elephants with howdahs; one seated elephant stands up; view of other elephants (285-309); a long line of elephants cross a stream – some 700 elephants were used in the shoot (345); ELS of 50+ elephants walking along the dried-up bed of the River Thute (351-360); closer view as they pass along side of a river – intertitles state that the Prince waves to the camera. (No tiger kill is seen) (370-401). The Prince inspecting a large quantity of animals bestowed on him as gifts by the Maharaja (state not given). The animals are all in wooden crates; the Prince looks at the crates accompanied by a large retinue and watches a baby elephant (502). "Au Revoir to Nepal" (504ft).

Note: The style of intertitles is the same as in *OUR GREATEST AMBASSADOR*. The Nepal tiger hunt on elephant footage is also contained in that film.

### Context

The period immediately following the First World War was one of profound change in Indian political life. In recognition of the war services of Indians the British government drew up its future plans for the sub-continent. This led to the announcement, made by Edwin Montagu in 1917, that the goal of British policy was 'increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration' (Brown, 1994, 204). This statement was ratified in the Government of India Act of 1919, which for the first time promised Indians a degree of self-government. The flipside of this Act was the 1919 Rowlatt Bills, which extended war regulations aimed at controlling public unrest into peacetime. It was in response to this legislation that Gandhi first entered all-India politics. On 6 April 1919 he called for Indians to suspend business and to fast as a sign of protest. There were also more violent protests to these measures, which in turn prompted violent responses from the British authorities. In 1920 Gandhi joined the Indian National Congress party, which endorsed his calls for a concerted campaign of non-co-operation, which lasted from 1 August 1920 to February 1922.

It was against this background that the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VIII) embarked upon a tour of the sub-continent. Weary of ceremonial duties the Prince was not excited by the prospect, and he had hoped that the Indian protest movement would provide an excuse not to go. Prior to departure he wrote to Freda Dudley-Ward about his fears that 'the trouble in India seems to be subsiding and that there isn't a chance of it stopping my going, damn it' (Ziegler, 1991, 136). Several political figures thought it unwise to send the Prince to India, but the tour was endorsed by the

Viceroy, Lord Reading, who thought that backing out of it would be seen as a victory for the Indian nationalists (Ziegler, 1991, 135; Donaldson, 1974, 86). The eventual tour did witness protests, including serious rioting in Bombay and Calcutta. However, the main effects of the non-co-operation movement for the Prince were depleted crowds and what he viewed as over-protection by the police.

During the tour the Prince experienced much that he disliked. He was opposed to the 'official rot and pompousness', and complained that he was prevented from seeing 'the truths of India' due to an 'interposed layer of British officialdom and princely autocracy' (Ziegler, 1991; 136; Windsor, 1998, 173). He was not a supporter of the independence movement, regarding Edwin Montagu as 'that despicable man' who had 'given in and pandered to the natives' (Ziegler, 1991, 139). The Indian princes also received his scorn: the Prince thought that 'their ceremonies are so irritating and ridiculous' (Ziegler, 1991, 136). In Nepal a tiger shoot was arranged for him, entailing the employment of ten thousand Nepalese to build several miles of roads (Windsor, 1998, 173). The Prince, however, was not keen on big game shooting, and disappointed the Maharaja by taking time out to exercise his polo pony instead (Ziegler, 1991, 141). He was negative about the results of his tour. In December he wrote to King George V, stating 'I'm very depressed about my work in British India as I don't feel that I'm doing a scrap of good; in fact I can say that I know I am not'. He cited the main reasons as being the 'boycotting of my visits to the various cities in British India by the non-co-operators' (Windsor, 1998, 171).

The official film of the tour was shot by George Taylor-Woods, who had gained experience working for Topical Budget and as an official cameraman in the First World War. Twelve reels of film of the tour were compiled for the company Cinechrome, who specialised in making colour films. Some reports state that the tour was shot in colour (Nowotny, 1983, 36). However, the *Kinematograph Weekly* review of the footage makes no mention of colour photography (*KM*, 6 April 1922, 54), and nor does their review of the films once distribution had been taken up by the Stoll Film Company (*KM*, 25 May 1922, 53). Stoll released the footage in a series of six two-reel films, giving them the tagline 'England's Greatest Ambassador'. The film discussed here is something of a curiosity. It contains footage that can be found among three of the Stoll compilations, but also features scenes that are not included in the distributed films.

## Analysis

In its review of the original Cinechrome footage the *Kinematograph Weekly* stated that one of the selling points for the film would be ‘the extent to which India is nowadays appearing in the news’ (KM, 6 April 1922, 54). Nevertheless, as they later reported, the footage contains ‘no evidence of the “boycott” which has been made such a feature of the royal progress by a section of the daily Press’ (KM, 25 May 1922, 53). This is partly because the film deliberately concentrates upon ceremonials rather than disturbances, and also due to the way in which the film interprets the action. This compilation begins with footage shot in Calcutta, which witnessed protests against the tour. A title card nevertheless states that the Prince was ‘warmly received’. Moreover, the way in which the scenes are shot offers little chance to gauge the mutual responses between the Prince and the people of India. The filming in Calcutta commences with scenes shot close beside the Prince’s landau. This positioning enables the cameraman to capture the full splendour of the Prince’s carriage and of his party as they disembark, but it also means that the local people are outside the frame. The next scene shows the Prince flanked by the Viceroy and his wife on a richly adorned dais; no other people can be witnessed in the scene. Furthermore, it is shot looking up towards the Prince, thus enhancing his royal majesty and its isolation. Scenes shot in Nepal offer a different perspective. Here we witness a ceremony in which locals mark their respect by throwing rice and flowers towards the royal car. However, this time it is the prince who cannot be seen: a static camera position means that his vehicle quickly speeds through the frame before his emotions can be registered.

The most interesting scenes are of the Prince’s activities in Nepal. The cameraman is adept in capturing the spectacle of the tiger hunt. Although we don’t get to see all of the ‘700 elephants engaged in the shoot’, the cameraman does manage to convey something of the scale of the operation. He composes attractive shots that focus upon the majesty of massed elephants rather than on the huntsmen or their quarry. This may reflect the Prince’s lack of engagement in the shoot. There is a telling scene in which the Prince ‘waves to our “movie” man across the stream’. The sequence shows a long procession of elephants, each bearing elaborate howdahs that contain three or four marksmen. The Prince is not on one of these, but eventually appears some distance from the front, riding alone on the back of the smallest elephant in the herd. His gesture towards the cameraman suggests that he may have been more interested in the filming process than in the hunt that was underway.

There follows a sequence in which the Maharaja bestows upon the Prince ‘numerous gifts in the form of living animal specimens from the forests of Nepal’. The footage then shows a slowly perambulating party looking into crates of different sizes and shapes. As if this menagerie were not

enough the following scene shows the Prince being given a baby elephant. These scenes provide the greatest opportunity to view the actions and emotions of the Prince. Unfortunately Taylor-Woods betrays some uncertainty regarding how to frame these shots. He occasionally uses panning movements to capture the action but is uncertain whether to focus on the prince, the Nepalese hosts, or the gifts.

While generally full of praise for the film the *Kinematograph Weekly* correctly stated that the photography is 'variable' and that some scenes 'would benefit from considerable cutting' (*KM*, 6 April 1922, 54; *KM*, 25 May 1922, 53). The journal also complained that the films feature 'too much ceremonial'. This focus upon ceremonial is nevertheless a true reflection of the Prince's responsibilities on the tour, and the fact that there is too much of it could be said to echo his point of view. It is also indicative of the way in which the tour was orchestrated in order to avoid India's political unrest.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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Titles

**SCENES AT HIS EXCELLENCY THE VICEROY'S GARDEN PARTY AT  
BELVEDERE**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4830>

Technical Data

Year:

1926

Running Time:

6 minutes

Film Gauge (Format):

35mm Film

Colour:

Black/White

Sound:

Silent

Footage:

373 ft

Production Credits

Production Company

Madan Theatres

**Synopsis**

ACTUALITY. Garden party given by Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India during the Calcutta 'season'.

Main title (10). The garden party guests arriving (mainly Europeans). They cross lawn in front of the house (52). The Viceroy's party passing in front of the house. The steps are lined by a guard of honour (66). Scenes of the guests at tables taking tea and attended to by servants. Guests include Lord Irwin and Lord Lytton (Governor of Bengal). Indian guests are also present. Colonel McKenzie (military secretary to the Governor of Bengal) at tea and puts on a pair of sunglasses. The childrens' table, with Davina Lytton, a young Indian prince (?), and one of Lord Irwin's sons (250-282). Anthony and Davina Lytton and Ann Wood with the Viceroy's daughter act out an introduction for the camera. Mrs McKenzie on a sofa taking tea with another woman. Pan of the garden party and the guests (373ft).

## Context

The Conservative politician Edward Frederick Lindley Wood, Lord Irwin (later Lord Halifax), held the post of Viceroy of India from 1926 to 1931. He spoke of Indian politics as being held ‘in suspense’ at the time he assumed his position (Brown, 1994, 231). Andrew Roberts has noted that ‘At the outset of Irwin’s Viceroyalty the Independence movement was a weak and demoralized affair’ (Roberts, 1992, 21). Irwin did believe that eventual Indian self-government was inevitable (Roberts, 1992, 1992), but conceded in his autobiography that ‘neither I nor anybody else could have foreseen how rapid that movement would be’ (Halifax, 1957, 112). His period in office saw great political transformations, evidenced by the rise in power of the Indian National Congress and the return of Mahatma Gandhi to national politics. It culminated with his 1929 declaration that Dominion status was the goal of British policy in India, and with the implementation of his Round Table Conferences, at which representatives from the British government, British India and the Princely states convened to discuss constitutional reforms in India.

This film was made in 1926, during the Irwins’ first stay at Belvedere, their official residence in Calcutta, Bengal. In his autobiography Irwin writes that it was customary ‘to spend two or three weeks round Christmas at Calcutta’ (Halifax, 1957, 129). This first visit, made ‘when everything was necessarily strange’, was overseen by Lord Lytton, the Governor of Bengal (Halifax, 1957, 130). During this period Bengal was not in political suspension. There was a strong nationalist movement in the state, which had witnessed outbreaks of terrorist violence, including an attempt to blow up Lytton’s train (Lytton, 1942, 6). In response, Lytton had pressed for the instatement of emergency powers, which were granted in late 1924, following which over 50 nationalist leaders were arrested (*The Times*, 29 October 1924, 15).

Irwin does not mention these events in his autobiography. Instead he describes Belvedere as being ‘unpretentious but comfortable’, and recalls ‘the noise of animals in the adjacent zoo’ (Halifax, 1957, 130). He also writes of the ‘the value of making contact with the European business community’ and of the ‘great pressure of political and social engagements’ (Halifax, 1957, 130). The Irwins were, in fact, inveterate hosts. Throughout their period in India there were numerous garden parties, dances, and state balls. Roberts has calculated that there were on average three dinner parties a fortnight, to which between 75 and 120 guests would be invited (Roberts, 1992, 23); by Irwin’s own reckoning, at his Delhi home there were ‘never less than twenty-five or thirty for luncheon’ (Halifax, 1957, 130).

This film was made by the Indian film company, Madan Theatres. Jamshed Framji Madan, a Calcutta theatre owner, had first introduced film projections in his venues in 1902. In the early years of the twentieth century his company grew to be India's 'largest production-distribution-exhibition empire' (Garga, 2007, 13). They first ventured into filmmaking in 1919, producing feature films, industrial films, as well as 'topicals'. These latter films were news reports, covering events such as 'Social engagements, royal visits and arrivals and departures of the governors and viceroys' (Garga, 2007, 40). Following J. J. Madan's inheritance of the firm from his father in 1923, Madan Theatres rose to its greatest heights: by 1927 it had sole control of a quarter of all cinema halls in India, ten of which were in Calcutta itself (Sharma). These topical reports would have been widely seen, serving as an 'added attraction' to the main feature film (Garga, 2007, 40).

### Analysis

Lord Irwin believed that British rule in India was dependent on Indians' sense of awe towards the Raj; consequently he thought that 'the whole position is essentially psychological' (Roberts, 1992, 20). This film provides evidence of how Irwin's formal engagements helped to encourage this sense of awe, and of how film itself helped to underpin this psychological rule.

As the film's title suggests, *Scenes at his Excellency the Viceroy's Garden Party at Belvedere* is one of Madan Theatres' productions depicting the social engagements of British officials. Present at this party are the Irwin and Lytton families, as well Colonel McKenzie, Lord Lytton's military secretary. There is no intimation of the troubles that Bengal was facing. The party is not, however, solely the preserve of British guests: also present are a number of Indians, whose names are unfortunately not documented.

Robin Baker argues that the event 'feels distinctly like the awkward "bridge party" – i.e. bridging two nations – in E.M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India*' (Baker). These two nations are first seen arriving separately. A number of British guests are seen crossing the lawn in front of Belvedere, until finally a lone Indian walks into view. The second scene presents a more formal entrance, as several guests emerge from Belvedere, heading down its steps, which are lined with a guard of honour. Last to emerge is another solitary Indian guest, who slowly passes the guard.

The bulk of the film consists of scenes of the garden party itself. The tables have been arranged so that each includes both British and Indian guests. The proceedings are stiff and awkward; however, it is difficult to gauge whether this is due to the forced mingling of the two nations or whether it is



reflective of any formally arranged party, in particular one at which a film crew is present.

Belvedere could only be considered 'unpretentious but comfortable' to those accustomed to a high social life. During their period in India the Irwins had in regular employment over a thousand servants (Roberts, 1992, 23). In these scenes the main activity is provided by numerous butlers, who hurry to meet their guests' requirements. Here too there is a meeting of two nations: both British and Indian domestic staff are in evidence, although it is the British staff who appear to be giving the orders.

Towards the end of the film the garden party breaks up a little, at which point the guests appear more relaxed. The people in the film who appear most at ease are the younger members of the party. Roberts notes that the Irwins' children had the knack of lending their 'court' a 'relaxed family atmosphere' (Roberts, 1992, 23). Here one of Lord Irwin's sons is seen laughing and playing with a top hat, which he motions to place over the top of a young Indian boy's turban. There is also a scene in which Lytton's children, who are dressed in up-to-date 1920s styles, jokingly act out an introduction for the camera.

At the garden party there are more British than Indian guests in evidence. The British guests also appear to be the main focus of the filmmakers' attention. In the opening scene the film cuts just as the first Indian guest crosses the Belvedere lawn. During the party there are shots of several tables, but most are arranged so that it is a British guest that is the centre of the composition. These shots are sequenced in hierarchical order: centre-frame at the first table is Irwin and centre-frame at the second table is Lytton. During the more informal scenes towards the end of the film the Indian guests are notable by their absence. The exception is the final scene, which is a panned shot, encompassing all of the guests at the party. As with the opening of the film, British and Indian guests are seen walking separately, but this time the most prominent figures are the Indian guests: several pairs of Indian men are in evidence and, separated from the British, they are now engrossed in conversation.

**Richard Osborne (April 2010)**

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Titles

**SINGAPORE A STUDY OF A PORT**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1004>

Technical Data

\* Year:

\* Colour:

Black/White

Production Credits

\* Production Countries:

Great Britain

\* Director

SALT, Brian

Producer – Frank Wells

Supervisor – G.C. Cons

\* Production Company

Gaumont-British Instructional

**Colonial Film Synopsis**

Title cards. Shots filmed from a vessel as it enters the harbour. Singapore is ‘the seventh largest port in the world’. Passenger cargo boat arriving at the port, five European travellers disembark. Male traveller taking in the view. Views of the harbour buildings of ‘European and Asiatic merchants’. Native boats working in the harbour. European tourists viewing Raffles Place: Sir Stanford Raffles ‘bought the swampy island of Singapore in 1819 for the East India Company and set up a free port to extend British trade’. Map of south-east Asia with Singapore at its centre. Shipping routes are highlighted on the map. Map of Singapore Island highlighting its suitability for a settlement. Long-shot looking from the city out to sea. Trading ships in the ‘free port’ of Singapore. Goods being unloaded from ships in the harbour. An elephant hoisted out of a boat by a crane. Men loading goods in a warehouse. A large boat being repaired in a dry dock. Workers in a boat repair shop at the harbour; these locals ‘have the opportunity to learn skilled trades’. The island of Pulau Brani: workers on the deck of a ship (local men are overseen by a European); workers smelting tin-ore in a factory; ‘Chinese girls’ making rubber-soled shoes in a factory (the Chinese ‘make up almost three-quarters of the population of Singapore’). Raw latex being fed down a pipe into the tanker of a ship. Latex being tapped from rubber trees.

Coconut plantations and pineapple fields. The drainage system that has been implemented to help cure malaria. Locals building drains to reclaim swamp land for building. Men spraying mangrove swamps to prevent malaria. Downpour in the streets of Singapore. One of Singapore's reservoirs. Map of Singapore, highlighting: reservoirs, residential areas, the business centre, government buildings, docks, the homes of 'well-to-do Asiatic citizens' in Kallang, and the houses of 'European officials and businessmen' beside the estuary. Large houses in the suburbs, one of them is 'enriched with fantastic oriental decoration'. Shots filmed from a boat in the harbour of the 'crowded quarters' on either side of the Singapore river: 'Chinese, Malays and Indians make up most of the population, there are only about ten-thousand Europeans'. Shops in a city street 'covered with Chinese signs'. Motor vehicles and tri-shaws in the city streets. Laundry hung across a street between its buildings. A mosque at the end of a street. A Hindu temple that stands next to a gas holder: 'the mixture of east and west and typical'.[SENSE?] Multi-storey offices of international businesses on Collyer Quay. Panned shot from one of these office roofs looking at the 'busy heart of Singapore'. Government buildings in Empress Place. Porter carrying travellers' bags on to a boat, followed by the European travellers. Shots filmed from a boat as it pulls away from the harbour. Credits.

### Context

*Singapore – A Story of a Port* (1951) is one of the latter films made by the company Gaumont-British Instructional, which specialised in educational films, many of them concerned with the countries of the British Empire. The company was founded in 1933 as a subsidiary of the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation. It worked closely with academics, and it is notable that the main billing in this film goes to its 'supervisor', G.C. Cons, head of the Geography department at Goldsmith's College, and a pioneer in the field of geography films for schools (Briault, 1960, 123). This film was produced by Frank Wells, son of the author H.G. Wells. It was directed by Brian Salt, who was also responsible for the G-B Instructional film, *Citizen of Singapore* (1950), and was prolific in a variety of non-fiction film types, filmed in the UK as well as abroad. Salt is also remembered for directing the 1958 film, *Toto and the Poachers*, a children's feature set in Africa (Moss, 2006, 34).

Singapore, situated at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula, was home to a Malay fishing village and the indigenous Orang Laut people prior to European settlement. It was in 1819 that Sir Stanford Raffles 'founded' modern Singapore, working on behalf of the British East India Company. The Company purchased the island outright in 1824. The city quickly attracted migrants, and town planning was an early concern. Lieutenant Philip Jackson's 'Plan of the Town of Singapore', drawn up in 1822, laid out the city as a series of ethnic subdivisions: a European town, the Chinese

Kampong for the Chinese, the Chulia Kampong for Indians, and the Kampong Glam for Muslims, Malays and Arabs (Eng, 1992, 164). Although this concept of racial segregation was later abandoned, the effects of this layout can still be witnessed. Raffles had recognised the suitability of the location for a trading post, but it was not until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the extension of British influence in the Malay states in the late nineteenth century that Singapore confirmed assured its status as a world port (Turnbull, 1989, xii).

Following World War II there were debates about Singapore's future status. Some groups, in both Britain and Singapore, advocated that the island should become part of a new federation of Malay States (Turnbull, 1989, 216-19). In Britain, Singapore's importance in terms of international trade and geopolitics was of concern, and governmental authorities eventually decided that it should not form part of this union, instead regarding Singapore as a 'military base and centre for the spread of British commerce and influence in the region' (Stockwell, 2001, 485). Singapore was nevertheless affected by events taking place in nearby countries. The uprising of communists in Malaya in 1948 and the victory of communists in China the following year led to a clamp-down on political opposition within Singapore (Turnbull, 1989, 233).

Following the War, Singapore suffered food shortages and chronic overcrowding. However, by 1947 trade exceeded pre-war levels and social services had improved (Turnbull, 1989, 228, 234). This also had the effect of quietening the more radical opposition parties, and the most successful of Singapore's political groups in the 1948 and 1951 elections was the Progressive party, who co-operated with the British in their aims (Turnbull, 1989, 231). The Colonial authorities advocated that Singapore should move towards self-government in stages, gradually opening up a new Legislative Assembly to more local politicians (Stockwell, 2001, 477).

In 1951 Singapore reported a record trading year, the economy benefiting from the effects of the Korean War (Turnbull, 1989, 236). The population retained its diverse mix: in 1947 Singapore was comprised of approximately 78% Chinese, 12% Malays and Indonesians, 7% Indians, and 3% Europeans, Eurasians and other minorities (Turnbull, 1989, 229).

### **Analysis**

The main emphasis of this film is laid out in its title: Singapore is defined in relation to its maritime activities. As the reviewer for *Film User* puts it, this film regards the city as a 'Traffic junction for both passengers and merchandise' (*FU*, July 1951, 358). Indeed, the viewer is provided with the

point-of-view of one of these passengers. The film opens with shots filmed from a boat as it arrives at the port. The commentary informs us that what we are witnessing is what the average passenger would see: 'almost all travellers get their first sight of Singapore from the harbour'. It then shows a party of travellers descending the steps of passenger boat. One in particular is focussed upon, and we see him stop to take in the sights. The film then returns to what could be described as point-of-view shots, as we are led along this traveller's journey into the city. Significantly, the traveller whose view we assume is a white, wealthy-looking male. It is a western view of the city that we are given. After we have seen what Singapore has to offer, the travellers (and the viewer) return to a boat. The film's final point-of-view shot has us looking back at the harbour as the ship pulls away.

*Film User* described this film as being of 'much value for the geography lesson' (*FU*, July 1951, 358). Political geography is the documentary's main subject, but with a bent towards commerce and urbanisation, rather than the backgrounds of the people of Singapore. The commentary is fact-based, its dispassionate tone enhanced by virtue of the fact that (as with many GBI films) there is no backing music used. We learn that Singapore is the 'seventh largest port in the world' and that Sir Stanford Raffles bought the island in 1819 'to extend British trade'. A summary of the products that are handled at the port is given; a roll-call that underlines the importance of trade between the countries of the Empire. The benefits of this commercial activity are also outlined. We are informed that the port has provided locals with the chance 'to learn skilled trades' (at which point a Chinese boat-builder is shown). The film's educational mission is furthered by its occasional use of maps, which point out trading routes and the suitability of the location for a port. Only after it has detailed tin-making, shoe-making, the tapping of rubber trees, the steps made to check the spread of malaria, and the island's reservoir system, does the film turn to the Singaporean people. We learn that the city has 'varied races and religions', and we also learn something of wealth distribution amongst its 'one million inhabitants'. The differences in creed and in wealth are both conveyed with images of architecture. To illustrate the different religions we are shown the exterior of a mosque and a temple, and to illustrate the differences in status we are shown representative buildings (with a bias towards wealthy residences) and also the location of particular districts on a map.

Given its story-telling method, it is perhaps fitting that the film gets no closer to the people of Singapore than the 'average passenger' would. In fact, out of all those shown in the film, the closest attention and greatest amount of screen time is given to the European tourists. The film even admits to the cursory nature of our visit: 'The travellers come via Singapore, change ships, and leave again'.

The circular nature of the film's story helps to disguise the fact that, in terms of its coverage of the Singapore's trade and infrastructure, the film has shown us more than a typical visitor would get to see. Moreover, the camerawork is not restricted to simple point-of-view shots. Some sophisticated techniques are employed. In particular, good use is made of panning movements. On occasions the cameraman moves from what can at first appear to be a fairly innocuous image towards a more revealing aspect of Singapore, which in addition sheds light on the original choice of image. For example, one shot begins by showing the corner of a slightly run-down building, and then pans towards a busy harbour street with people unloading goods. It then provides us with a final contrast, settling on a view towards 'the great office buildings of European and Asiatic merchants'. The filmmakers also show a talent for telling juxtapositions. For example, while filming the Hindu temple they also capture the gas holder that stands nearby. Unfortunately, however, and in keeping with the GBI tendency towards simplification for the sake of clarity, Singapore's distinct 'mixture of east and west' is not elaborated upon by the commentary.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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<b>Film Number</b>	APY 37
<b>Film Title</b>	LIFE IN AIR COMMAND SOUTH EAST ASIA [Main] <b>SO THIS IS INDIA</b>
<b>Web Address</b>	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5430">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/5430</a>
<b>Production Date</b>	1945
<b>Production Country</b>	GB
<b>Production Sponsor</b>	Air Ministry
<b>Production Company</b>	Royal Air Force Film Production Unit

A two-reel edited film by the RAF Film Production Unit for presentation to airmen bound for India, giving an idealised account of what they might expect to encounter after being posted to Air Command South East Asia (ACSEA).

Reel 1: Model of India, filmed at low angle with crawl of text; 'RAF Film Production Unit presents Life in Air Command South East Asia'. The map flips upright, so the camera is looking directly down on it, and commentary explains the basic geography of India. Bombay and 'escape from the discomfort of life on a troopship'. Accommodation at Worli. Commentary tells audience to expect beggars; average income apparently only two shillings a week. Drive through Bombay with modern flats by Chowpatty Beach. 'Sunbathing is unwise' with advice for developing a tan 'essential for the really handsome man' and refers to WAAFs (women of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force) now being deployed to India. Shopping advice; Bombay apparently one of the most expensive cities in the world. More beggars; 'some picturesque, all dirty, a few even genuine'. Advice about snakes 'little enough risk if you keep your boots on'. Horse racing; betting followed by pay parade. Postings are announced. Kit is packed up for travel by rail; at a halt 'drinking water should always be boiled'.

Model shot; Delhi is marked and described as 'where most of the WAAFs will go'. WAAFs go



sightseeing, take camel and pony trap rides. WAAFs shopping. Model; Calcutta is marked and described as the gateway to Burma. Scenes at Howrah. Calcutta 'far more Indian than Bombay'. More postings announced with men falling out. Parade dismissed. Model shot; Madras is marked 'capital of a province with its own culture and history'. People of Madras 'smaller and darker-skinned'. Basha billet with a bearer carrying a man's equipment. Importance of mosquito nets; net collapses and entangles an airman. Char wallah arrives and a man takes shower pumped by small Indian boy. Airman picks a banana from a tree. Indian servants 'work absurdly cheaply'; shots of char wallah, shoe shiner, barber and tailor. Sign warns of danger of sharks.

Reel 2: Model shot; Ceylon, 'where it's no hardship to live in a tent'. Maintenance of Sunderland flying boats. Sailing and swimming. Model shot; Burma 'hot, dusty, and there are mosquitos'. Forward areas 'some discomforts must be suffered'. Post Office at Imphal. Rations served. Monsoon weather 'in three months as much water falls as in three years at home – even in Lancashire'. Effects of monsoon weather on aircraft and vehicles. Church service. Swimming in the sea on coastal airstrip. ENSA show on forward air strip. Local dances. Athletics. Model shot; men go on leave in Darjeeling. Buddhist locals and Tibetan antiques. Pony trekking; a chance to meet European women 'they brighten up the scenery'. Tea planters' hospitality. Change of tone; the sole end of the RAF 'to keep the kites flying, pounding the enemy until the final V-day'. THE END over mountains.

## Notes

This film is an edit of various reels of mute rushes also held by the Imperial War Museum Film Archive. See related items.

An interesting film which attempts to deal with a geographically massive Command in a meaningful way. However, we might note occasional absurdities in the commentary, the unsurprisingly superior tone towards the Indian population, and an apparent preoccupation with airmen's opportunities for pursuing women of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force or other European women. For a force dedicated to the sole end 'to keep the kites flying, pounding the enemy until the final V-day', we might also notice the scarcity of shots of aircraft actually on operations.

This film probably reached only a limited audience, as the footage it includes was only shot in the first half of 1945, with some coming as late as May 1945.

## Comments

See "Official Film Titles" textbase

## Related Items

IWM film ABY 73 - 'So This Is India'.  
 IWM film ABY 74 - 'So This is India - Additional footage'.  
 IWM film ABY 90 - 'So This Is India - An RAF Thunderbolt squadron moves from Bengal to Imphal valley'.  
 IWM film ABY 91 - 'So This Is India - Aircraftman Murray goes forward'.  
 IWM film ABY 92 - 'So This Is India - Aircraftman Flower arrives at RAF Redhills Lake, Madras, India'.  
 IWM film ABY 105 - 'So This Is India - Airmen on leave in Darjeeling'.  
 IWM film ABY 109 - 'So This Is India - Train Sequence'.  
 IWM film ABY 26 - 'RAF build their own church at Agartala, Bengal, India'.  
 IWM film ABY 28 - 'The RAF at work under monsoon conditions at Imphal'.  
 IWM film ABY 53 - 'The first contingent of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force arrives in India'.  
 IWM film ABY 61 - 'Ceylon flying boat base'.  
 IWM film ABY 95 - 'Burmese thank 14th Army commander at Monywa'

## Production Credits

Swain, J (Flying Officer): director (?)  
 Sheridan, V: compiler  
 Goozee, S (Sergeant): cameraman  
 Clot, D F E (Sergeant): cameraman  
 Layzell, R G (Sergeant): cameraman  
 Lang, T W (Pilot Officer): cameraman  
 Hughes, H R (Flight Sergeant): cameraman  
 McKee, J L (Sergeant): cameraman

## Number of Reels

2

<b>Length</b>	1713 ft
<b>Running Time</b>	19 mins
<b>Black &amp; White/Colour</b>	B&W
<b>Silent/Sound</b>	Sound
<b>Language of Soundtrack</b>	English
<b>Language of Main Titles</b>	English
<b>Index: Themes</b>	Far East 1939-1945 Aerial Warfare Royal Air Force 1939-1945
<b>Context Date</b>	Second World War
<b>Index:</b>	Air Command South East Asia
<b>Units/Organisations</b>	Royal Air Force, Women's Auxiliary Air Force
<b>Index: Place</b>	Madras, Madras Presidency, India Bombay, West India, India Calcutta, North East India, India Darjeeling, North East India, India Delhi, North Central India, India Monywa, Burma Imphal, Manipur, India Koggala, Ceylon
<b>Acquisition Method</b>	Transfer
<b>Access Conditions</b>	IWM

**Rights** Crown

**Status of Film** 1

**Status of Record** 3

**Status of Indexes** 3

### *Context*

The footage that comprises *Life in Air Command South East Asia* was shot during the final months of World War II, with some sequences being filmed as late as May 1945. It was filmed and compiled by the RAF Film Production Unit, a body set up in September 1941 to document the RAF's wartime activities and to make training and information films (Chapman, 1998, 155). The unit had no ambitions to 'cut across the interests of the commercial film trade' and was staffed from within the service (Buckman, 1997, 220). It was disbanded at the end of 1945, partly for financial reasons but also because it had fulfilled its remit (Buckman, 1997, 223). The film covers RAF activities in India, Burma and Ceylon, and its intended audience would have been RAF airmen destined for the Burmese campaign. The success of these operations in mid-1945 would have curtailed the usefulness of this film.

Burma was the front line in Britain's war against Japan, and provided some of the harshest conditions faced by the Allies. The Burmese campaign drew personnel from throughout the Empire, including India, Africa and Burma itself (Jackson, 2006, 341). Air power was vital in these operations, and RAF personnel in India and Burma grew from 11,600 in September 1941 to 122,000 by May 1945, when they represented 13% of the RAF's total strength (Jackson, 2006, 365-66). Air Command, South East Asia was formed in November 1943 under Lord Mountbatten, the Allied commander of South East Asia Command. The Royal Indian Air Force also expanded during this period, rising from 1,600 men at the beginning of the war to 28,500 at its close (Jackson, 2006, 367). However, unlike the combined forces of the army, the Royal Indian Air Force operated separately from the RAF (Jackson, 2006, 367).

During the War, India, Burma and Ceylon each made significant strides towards independence, a status that would be achieved by each country before the 1940s were over. Ceylon was largely

supportive during the War, and the country's independence has been seen in part as a reward for its loyalty (Ashton, 2001, 461). India's wartime support in both manpower and materials also helped to secure the country its independence. However, the part played by the Indian National Congress, who refused to support the War, was also of great importance: their resistance led to the Cripps Offer of 1942, which promised Dominion status for India at the War's end (Brown, 1994, 328). Burma was the only one of the countries to be occupied during the War, and during this period some of its political factions actively supported the Japanese. Following the recapture of Burma in 1945, the British issued a White Paper outlining plans for giving the country Dominion status (Comstock, 1946, 239). However, events moved rapidly, and in 1948 Burmese nationalists secured complete independence (Thomson, 1957, 300). Unlike India and Ceylon, Burma decided not to become a member of the British Commonwealth.

### *Analysis*

Despite being shot when the War in south-east Asia was reaching its climax, *Life in Air Command South East Asia* has the feel of a peacetime film that aims to encourage conscription. Foreign lands are depicted as pleasant and diverting places to be posted to.

Burma is the one exception to this rule. The film admits that it is 'it's hot, and dusty, and there are mosquitoes', and it doesn't flinch from showing the harsh operational conditions in this country. The film is purposefully structured. Despite disclosing that 'most of you will find your way' to Burma, the country is not shown until near the end of the film. It is not depicted as being a permanent destination either: airmen are soon shown on leave in Darjeeling, where they take a holiday that we are informed would have cost £300 in peacetime. Various devices are employed to de-emphasise Burma. The film begins by giving a chronological account of the experience of RAF personnel in India. It commences with airmen arriving in Bombay, which the commentary admits is the 'least Indian of Indian cities'. Burma, at this point, is cast a distant land on the far side of the sub-continent. This distance is enhanced by the use of maps and by the disingenuous commentary. 'So you are posted to India. Well, I'll tell you the worst', the script begins. The worst is that 'India is 'much bigger than you expected'. The film then follows the airmen being posted to various parts of south-east Asia. Thus it is able to show Delhi, Calcutta, Madras and Ceylon, before eventually facing Burma and the War.

If the War is downplayed in this film, the movements towards independence in India, Ceylon and Burma are completely ignored. Additionally, the film largely bypasses the role of the other nations in

the military campaign. It is only in the Burmese segment that we get to see a number of Burmese and Indian personnel, and here they are shown competing against the RAF in sporting events. For most of the film the local people are given background roles and dismissed in casually racist terms. They are cast as being subservient ('you'll probably find plenty of Indian servants who'll work for you fairly cheaply'); deceitful ('beware of the small shopkeeper'); lazy ("“Why bother?” – that's the Indian motto"); and impoverished ('more and more beggars, some picturesque, all dirty, a few even genuine').

The device of showing different postings for the airmen enables the filmmakers to explore the variety provided by south-east Asia. Calcutta is described as being 'far more Indian than Bombay'; the people of Madras are 'smaller and darker skinned'; those of Darjeeling are 'very picturesque folk'. The filmmakers do display some sympathy towards the people they depict: India's multitude of beggars is excused by reference to the low income in the sub-continent. Local historical and cultural interest is nevertheless subordinated to what are perceived to be the main interests of the RAF: sun ('you'll soon develop that tan') and sex ('WAAF personnel have been posted to India too'). To sell the attractions of India, the country is frequently compared to Britain. It is hot, but no hotter than London before a thunderstorm; a shopping trip for the WAAF is compared to heading out to Woolworths; the monsoon rains are even worse than those of Lancashire (in contrast, the film admits of Burma that 'it's no use pretending that life here is much like home'). It could be argued that this film provides in miniature a portrait of British existence in the colonial territories: the interests of the visitors are prioritised, and the culture of the country is only understood in relation to the homeland. However, it should not be forgotten that, despite the fact it downplays the War, this film was aimed at military personnel who were receiving temporary postings, and that their role was to fight in a global conflict – like this film itself, these personnel were not primarily engaged with local concerns.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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USA 14

CATALOGUE NUMBER

ITEM NAME:

**The STILWELL ROAD**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6679>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1945

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

USA

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

US War Department

DESCRIPTION:

The construction of a supply route through Burma's jungles and mountains by US troops under General Joseph Stilwell during the Second World War.

### **Synopsis**

American film about the Allied victory in Burma, focussing primarily on the construction of the Ledo (Stilwell) Road in Northern Burma. Also explores other aspects of the campaign. Sequence of material is as follows:

Aerial shot through clouds towards a mountain range. Image replaced with a map; commentary outlines the need for a trade route through Burma to China 'to keep that country alive in its struggle against Japan'. Details of Japanese capture of Burma in 1942 resulting in the destruction of the original supply route to China. Allied retreat, culminating with General Stilwell's pledge to 'go back and retake the place'. Background on Burma and its people, outlining the difficulties the country presents to Allied troops: fighting in jungle and mountain terrain; facing extremes of climate; succumbing to tropical diseases. General Stilwell plots the reopening of the land bridge. Stilwell forms the American command C.B.I. and enlists Chinese to help his aims. Depiction of British command, under Sir Archibald Wavell and General Sir Claude Auchinleck. Training of Indian troops in readiness for the defence of their home country. Depiction of other constituents of the 'polyglot' Allied army. Outlining of alternative supply routes, which have proved inadequate, providing the need to construct the Ledo Road. Beginnings of this operation. Footage of the Chindits, led by Major General Charles Orde Wingate, in an operation behind enemy lines. Footage of a conference between Roosevelt and Churchill regarding plans for the war against Japan. Leads to



the formation of the joint South-East Asia Command, under Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten; General Stilwell appointed as deputy. Further building of the Ledo Road, along with the construction of a fuel pipeline from India to China. News on the malarial threat, with focus upon the work of the medical missionary Colonel Gordon Seagrave. Training for the re-conquest of Burma, including that given to Chinese and Indian personnel; Major General Frank Merrill's Marauders; and Colonel Philip Cochran's aerial supply team. Bombing of Japanese strongholds. Building of airbases by Asiatic labourers. Reinforcement of Japanese garrisons. Three of the campaigns against the Japanese: the British/Indian 14<sup>th</sup> Army in the Arakan peninsula; Stilwell drive in Mogaung and Myitkyina; Chindits in heart of Burma. Failed Japanese advances on Imphal and Kohima (captured Japanese film material used as part of this sequence). Capture of Mogaung. Thrust through the Salween River area by the Yunnan Chinese expeditionary force. American bombing of Japanese bases in Burma, Java, Manchuria and, eventually, Japan. Renewed Japanese offensive against China. Completion of the road. First convoy arriving in China, receiving the gratitude of the locals. Road is renamed the Stilwell Road 'in tribute to the man who had dedicated himself to the building of this great project'. Film closes with an aerial shot of the road.

Further production details [from Frank Capra and Leland A. Poague, *Frank Capra: Interviews* (Univ Press of Mississippi, 2004), p. xxxix]

Producer: Col. Frank Capra

Script. Capt. Oppenheimer, Lt. Col. Alex Bryce

Editing: Maj. Ludwig. Stg. Mann

[From Ian Jardine, 'The Burma Campaign on Film: 'Objective Burma' (1945), 'The Stilwell Road (1945) and 'Burma Victory' (1945)', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* v8. N1. 1988, 5-73 (p. 65)]

Producer: Col. Robert Presnell

Commentary written by: Col. Alex Bryce

Commentary spoken by: Ronald Reagan

Music: Franz Waxman

## Context

The American film *The Stilwell Road* has its origins in a project that was originally conceived in 1944 by the British Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, head of South-East Asia Command in World War II (Mackenzie, 2001, 126). Mountbatten wanted a documentary that would tell the

story of Allied forces in South-East Asia in World War II. Ultimately this became a film about the Burmese Campaign. His project was complicated by his ambitions. Mountbatten stated that the film should cover ‘all the principal activities of South-East Asia Command’, adding that ‘As such a film will cover Allied troops it should be a joint production – British and American’ (Jardine, 1988, 60). This would be no simple feat. Not only did the USA have different reasons for being in Burma – a wish to reopen the land route to China as opposed to the need to recapture a British colony – they also had a specific desire how their actions should be perceived. The country resolutely did *not* wish to be seen to be supporting Britain’s imperial project (Stockwell, 2001, 476).

Mountbatten wrote to the Chief of Staff of the US Army, General George C. Marshall, about the film and requested that Frank Capra be assigned to it. Work commenced but parties in America remained uneasy about the project. A memo addressed to ‘American Officials Only’ stated that there would ‘seem to be a good deal to be said against continuing the attempt to produce a cinematic document purporting to show an identity of American and British interests and objectives in Southeast Asia’ (Jardine, 1988, 60). Marshall also desired a shorter film than the feature-length treatment that was being proposed by Mountbatten (Jardine, 1988, 62). Ultimately, the combined Anglo-American project collapsed. It was instead agreed to share the source material to create two separate films. The US film became *The Stilwell Road*, while the UK project was handed over to producer David Macdonald and director Roy Boulting, who created *Burma Victory* (1945).

The American film centred on the construction of the land supply route to China across northern Burma. Originally called the Ledo Road, this thoroughfare was renamed the Stilwell Road after the American General Joseph Stilwell who oversaw most of the operation. This huge project, lasting from December 1942 until January 1945, entailed the labour of 15,000 American soldiers and 35,000 predominantly Chinese volunteers (Sankar, 24 May 2008). Unfortunately, by the time the road was completed the need for it had diminished. Supplies getting through to China by aeroplane outnumbered those that were carried via the road. Moreover, the defeat of Japanese forces was no longer dependent on keeping China involved in the war (Allen, 1984, xv).

The American film of the Burmese campaign was similarly overshadowed. The project was turned over to the producer Col. Robert Presnell and the film was narrated by Ronald Reagan, whose War service was undertaken in the 1st Motion Picture Unit of the United States Army Air Force. Both *Burma Victory* and *The Stilwell Road* were issued after the cessation of hostilities. It was the British

film, however, that gained the most plaudits and attention. This was true in both the UK and the USA. In America *Burma Victory* was distributed by Warner Bros; the US military authorities meanwhile decided that *The Stilwell Road* should not be shown commercially (Jardine, 1988, 65).

### *Analysis*

Ian Jardine has claimed that in terms of their accurate depiction of the Burmese campaign *The Stilwell Road* and *Burma Victory* are 'worse than useless' (Jardine, 1988, 68). He argues that they teach 'false things which have to be unlearned' (Jardine, 1988, 68). This comes across most clearly when the films are viewed back-to-back. They tell different stories and reach different conclusions about the same campaign.

Outlining the plans for the Burma film, Lord Burnham, Director of Public Relations at the War Office, stated that 'The picture must be good entertainment or it has failed before it starts. If it is not extensively booked and widely seen it has no value' (Burnham). He was particularly conscious of the viewing practices of audiences in the USA, believing that 'The American public are allergic to official material of any kind and a version of an official dispatch illustrated by indifferently relevant visual material would not go with a swing' (Burnham). It is ironic, then, that out of the eventual two films it is *The Stilwell Road* that is more focussed upon official material. Although both documentaries employ maps and statistics to tell their tales, the American film goes to greater lengths in detailing the command structure and the military plans of the Burmese campaign. It is also careful to disclose its use of reconstructed footage. An early title card states that 'Two close-ups of individuals have been re-enacted to permit live sound'. Meanwhile, *Burma Victory* does not admit to the fact that it features a combination of Burmese footage (of both genuine and staged action) and of scenes created in Pinewood studios.

*The Stilwell Road* is less narrow than its title suggests – the film does pay attention to British-driven aspects of the campaign. Moreover, it is more accurate than *Burma Victory* in the way that it outlines the chronology of the Allied manoeuvres. It also gives more detail regarding the Japanese plan of attack and is alone in incorporating film material captured from the enemy. Nevertheless, *The Stilwell Road* avoids any mention of the colonial status of Burma and it also largely devoid of any coverage of the British advance towards the capital, Rangoon. The Japanese invasion is portrayed as an attack upon the supply route to China, and it is the defeat of China that is outlined as presaging any advance towards India. 'This is the story of a bridge, it is a land bridge to China and its name is Burma', Reagan states at the start of the film. He adds that 'This is the story of the destruction of

that bridge and of the men who fought and died to rebuild it so that China could fight on'. All other aspects of the campaign are subordinated to this aim. In contrast to *Burma Victory*, which pointedly includes footage of the liberated Burmese, the American documentary climaxes with grateful Chinese citizens, celebrating the arrival of the first military convoy in their homeland.

Rather than showing the liberation of the Burmese, *The Stilwell Road* instead has footage of refugees from the country, pictured during the initial retreat from Burma. This ignominious part of the campaign is passed over in *Burma Victory*; it would have been undesirable for a British film to show the abandonment of a colony and of its people. In contradistinction, *The Stilwell Road* emphasises this withdrawal. The length of the retreat (in which no American forces were involved), makes the reopening of the land route appear all the more heroic.

A further contrast is provided by the way in which the films portray the people, culture and climate of Burma. *The Stilwell Road* features a brief segment in which Burma, 'a land of legend', is outlined. We get to see pagodas and Buddhas, as well as the country's 'strange and picturesque people' (here we see a woman lighting a smoking device and then a different woman who wears multiple rings around her extended neck). Such exoticism is lampooned in *Burma Victory*. The British film opens with a soldier casting aside a travel brochure that has talked of the 'romance' and 'sunshine' of the country. The brochure is contrasted with the reality of the monsoon rains. It should be admitted, however, that *The Stilwell Road* also portrays the Allied forces in Burma facing a 'perpetual struggle against nature'.

Ian Jardine is correct in his belief that the value of these films lies not in their historical accuracy, but instead in the way they 'shed light on the position of mass media in democratic society during war time' (Jardine, 1988, 68). Nevertheless, the emphases of *The Stilwell Road* and *Burma Victory* are sometimes surprising. For example, it is *The Stilwell Road* that takes the greatest pride in the 'polyglot army' that has been assembled to defend India, drawn as it is from the countries of the British Empire, allied with American and Chinese troops. The film features a roll call of 'Scots, Irish, English, Welsh, Australian, New Zealander, Indian, Gurkha, Burman, African, Chinese, American', which is matched with individually framed shots of soldiers from each of these nations. *Burma Victory* has a similar, but less overt sequence, in which the troops of various nations are shown listening to Mountbatten's speeches; however, their countries of origin are not mentioned by name. Moreover, although the colonial status of Burma is not mentioned in *The Stilwell Road*, this film does describe Calcutta as being the 'second largest city in the British Empire'. Britain's Empire,

meanwhile, is not mentioned in *Burma Victory*, an absence that can be attributed to the need to appeal to an American audience.

**Richard Osborne (September 2009)**

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COI 340

FILM NUMBER

FILM TITLE:

**SUEZ IN PERSPECTIVE**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2493>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1957 [1956]

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

Central Office of Information

**SHORT SUMMARY**

A justification of the Anglo-French 'intervention' in Suez.

**FULL SUMMARY:**

Introduction sketches background: Britain's "thankless and difficult" task in Palestine mandate; 1948 Arab-Israeli war and armistice. The advent of Nasser in Egyptian Revolution presented as an "ominous event", basically dishonest ("Promises of peace and prosperity... explain enthusiasm for a regime... incapable of fulfilling them") and menacing, with Soviet Arms, nationalising of canal and threats against Israel ("Cairo in 1956 reminded many of Berlin in 1939"). Israelis attack - "who knows how far they might have gone?" Britain and France move to "protect" Canal. Film of "Operation Musketeer", commentary stressing Allies' concern to minimise casualties; prompt acceptance of UN ceasefire. British restore order to occupied Port Said (aerial film proves "absolute nonsense" of Egyptian claims of damage) but the Canal is closed by blockships ("most sunk after Egypt had agreed to ceasefire"), "overwhelming evidence" of Nasser's irresponsibility. Advanced quality of captured weapons interpreted as evidence of dubious Russian motives. UN Peacekeeping force arrives: the film (quoting Churchill as second opinion) makes the world a gift of this British-made "new opportunity."

**NOTES**

Three films about the situation in Suez were made simultaneously: *The Facts about Port Said, Suez in Perspective* and a third film, *Report from Port Said* (see file INF 6/807 'Suez in Perspective' held at the National Archives). The films had different aims and intended audiences. *The Facts about Port Said*, a three-minute film, was 'designed to counter the Egyptian claim that most of Port Said has been destroyed'. It was made available in English and Arabic versions, and also without commentary. It

was despatched to fifty posts overseas and also shown in the UK in cinema and television newsreels. *Report from Port Said*, a 13 minute, 16mm film produced primarily for television showing overseas, deals with the same subject matter as *The Facts about Port Said*, but is also concerned 'with the care taken during operations to restrict damage to the minimum and subsequent action to restore the Port and town to normal'. It was only made available in its English version or without commentary, and was despatched to over 30 countries. Offcuts from these two films - including some of the more sensitive footage of damage to civilian areas - are held as SUEZ MATERIAL (COI 449).

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/A

NUMBER OF REELS:

2

LENGTH:

1715 ft

RUNNING TIME:

19 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTTLES:

None

**Context**

Britain had a complicated and worsening relationship with Egypt in the post-war period. The surrender of the British Mandate of Palestine in 1948 was one of the factors that led to the formation of Israel, which in turn led to 'a serious loss of goodwill from the Arab world towards Britain' (Robinson, 2001, 410). British military presence in Egypt and continued control (along with

France) of the Suez Canal, were further sources of discord. The British conceded to the withdrawal of troops in 1954. The nationalisation of the canal by the Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser in July 1956 provided the spark for conflict in the region.

Nasser came to power in 1954. During his initial period of rule his position was insecure, and it has been argued that this encouraged him to campaign against British influence in the Middle East, aiming to bolster his power (Barnett, 1992, 82-83). In turn, the British launched a propaganda campaign against Nasser, portraying him as a fanatic dictator and a Soviet 'stooge' (Shaw, 1996, 12). The countries of the United Nations debated how to respond to the nationalisation of the canal. While Britain, France and Israel contemplated co-ordinated action, the United States, now the most important outside power in the region, would not support the use of force (Hulbert, 2002, 263).

Secretly supported by Britain and France, Israel launched an attack on Egypt on 29 October 1956. Two days later, Britain and France 'intervened', planning to use the Egypt-Israel conflict as justification for renewed control of the Suez Canal. Among the most controversial aspects of the Anglo-French campaign was the attack upon the city of Port Said. This 'peacekeeping' mission resulted in an estimated 1,000 Egyptian fatalities, while in response 23 British and French military personnel were killed (Kyle, 2003, 502-03). In addition, around 900 Egyptians required hospital treatment, in comparison to the 121 injured members of the Anglo-French forces (Kyle, 2003, 503, 641). Although the city was not widely damaged, a block of houses was destroyed by air strikes, the shanty town was burnt down, and the Navy House was blown up (Kyle, 2003, 503).

Tony Shaw claims that Nasser was 'deeply conscious of the power of propaganda' (Shaw, 1996, 4). He publicised the attack on Port Said with 'articles, films, photographs and specially commissioned magazines' that were distributed widely and aimed in particular at the United States (Shaw, 1996, 179). Most damaging for his opponents was an article by the Swedish journalist Olof Perelew Andressen, which claimed that British and French troops had killed between 7,000 and 12,000 civilians in the city (Kyle, 2003, 641). The Anglo-French operation drew criticism from all quarters. The United Nations convened for an 'emergency special session' between 1 and 10 November 1956, which established the first United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) and called for an immediate ceasefire (United Nations, 1-10 November 1956). The British agreed to these terms, and announced a ceasefire on 6 November 1956, while troops were still on operational manoeuvres in Port Said. In December 1956 British and French troops were withdrawn from the city and replaced by Danish and Colombian units of the UNEF.



It has been argued that the British government's public relations policy during the crisis was a 'disaster' (Hulbert, 2002, 264). Tony Shaw counters that 'the British government appreciated the importance of "presenting" its policy to a far greater extent than the public then realized and historians have given it credit' (Shaw, 1996, 1-2). *Suez in Perspective* is one of three films that the Central Office of Information had in production as early as November 1956, the others being *The Facts about Port Said* and *Report from Port Said* ('Films on Suez'). The film was made as a response to Egyptian propaganda, including the film *The Anglo-French Aggression Against Egypt* (1956). It was designed to 'explain from the British point of view [...] the events which led to action by the Israelis against Egypt and the consequential action by the British and French to safeguard the Suez Canal' ('Films on Suez'). The COI commissioned the newsreel company British Movietone to make the film, and it is largely made up of the company's own library footage. It does, however, include material commissioned by the COI, such as the aerial documentation of Port Said and the shots of the blockships in the Canal (Pring, 14 December 1956; 'Cutter's Shot List'). *Suez in Perspective* was not intended for audiences in the UK; its distribution instead being designated as 'World Comprehensive', with its 'major showings' intended for 'specially invited audiences by Overseas Missions' ('Show Copy Approved'; 'Films on Suez'). The film was dubbed into numerous languages, including French, Italian, Finnish, Serbo-Croat, Latin-American Spanish, Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, and Sinhalese, while a special German version was made in Germany ('Showing of Films on Suez'). In the first week of December 1956 alone, nearly 200 prints were despatched by air to over seventy different territories ('Showing of Films on Suez').

### Analysis

There are two types of perspective in operation in this film. One is corrective, aiming to rectify the portrayal of events in Port Said. The other is to provide a long view, situating the Suez crisis within a series of events in the Middle East.

*Suez in Perspective* admits that it is a response. It begins by showing a series of international newspapers, all condemning the Anglo-French presence in Egypt. It then outlines the main cause for intervention: Nasser is portrayed as a military dictator whose ambitions will not cease with the Suez Canal. He is referred to as 'Colonel' throughout; there is footage of frenzied crowds; and much is made of an arms deal with Russia. We are shown 'war-like signs' in the streets of Cairo, which 'reminded many of Berlin in 1939'. This is a different image of the country from the one seen in *The Anglo-French Aggression Against Egypt*. The Egyptian film emphasises the independent and advanced

nature of Nasser's country: Port Said is portrayed as multi-cultural tourist destination, and Nasser himself is almost entirely absent from the film.

The first thing that we learn about the Anglo-French operation in *Suez in Perspective* is that 'it was planned with care and skill'. The film then spends much of its time rejecting claims made about the advance on Port Said. Here there are many echoes and contrasts with *The Anglo-French Aggression Against Egypt*. Where the Egyptian film talks of civilian targets (and depicts explosions), the British film talks of a desire to ensure minimum loss of life (and shows map rooms – a sequence that was also commissioned by the COI). Both films have extensive footage of the city: the Egyptian film to show the extent of the damage (conveyed largely by shots filmed from within the streets); the British film to show the lack of it (conveyed by primarily by aerial shots, but also via a shot of a woman sweeping up tiny fragments of rubble with a broom). Both films depict the wounded in hospital. The Egyptian film shows severely injured Egyptian casualties, tended by Egyptian staff; the British film shows both Egyptian and Anglo-French casualties and shows a Christian woman giving aid. Young children are featured in both films: in the Egyptian film they are searching for water supplies; in the British film they are playing with the invading troops. *The Anglo-French Aggression Against Egypt* depicts the flight of refugees and claims that the Egyptian government 'supplied all facilities for the evacuation'; *Suez in Perspective* shows British soldiers giving aid to the people of Port Said and claims that 'in the first week alone after the action, 2,500 tonnes of food were distributed to the population'. Both films argue for the self-evident power of their images, but paradoxically, in doing so, they encourage the more sceptical viewer to call them into question. When showing the injured in the hospital wards the Egyptian film claims, 'scenes that speak for themselves'; when using extreme long shots to convey the (lack of) damage to Port Said, the British film argues, 'anyone looking at this picture can easily see for himself'. Both films climax with speeches from national leaders. *The Anglo-French Aggression Against Egypt* quotes Nasser, stating that 'the whole world is with us, and I wish to make it quite clear to the free peoples of the world that the ordeal through which the world is passing at present is the responsibility of the aggressors who invaded Egypt'. *Suez in Perspective* quotes Churchill, stating 'In Britain we have the choice of taking decisive action or admitting once and for all our inability to put an end to strife'.

There is one claim made in *The Anglo-French Aggression Against Egypt* that *Suez in Perspective* fails to answer: that of collusion between the British and French governments and Israel. It would be 1967 before a member of the British government admitted that there had been agreement between the three countries (Beck, 2009, 608). *Suez in Perspective* ignores this accusation and instead maintains that

the British and French acted in order to provide stability in the region. Its longer view is that Britain had previously performed 'thankless and difficult' tasks in the Middle East (citing the example of Palestine) and had had to do so because of the ineffectiveness of the United Nations (citing the UN's inability to provide a police force in Israel). Thus, rousing the UN to intervene in this conflict is presented as the outcome that the British and French had desired all along. At the beginning of the film we learn that 'the Anglo-French action can open the way to new opportunity for the United Nations and the world', and at the conclusion the commentator contemplates 'what a different story it might have been had a similar emergency force come to this part of the world when Britain gave up her mandate in Palestine in 1948'. It is perhaps apt, however, that in its concluding images, which show the people of the Middle East living harmoniously side-by-side, *Suez in Perspective* finds no place for the British or French.

**Richard Osborne (May 2010)**

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FILM TITLE:

**the SULTAN OF EGYPT'S FUNERAL**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6146>

PRODUCTION DATE:

1917

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION SPONSOR:

War Office Cinema Committee

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Topical Film Company

SHORT SUMMARY:

The funeral of Hussein Kemal, first Sultan of Egypt, in Cairo, 10 October 1917.

FULL SUMMARY:

The chief mourner is the Sultan's brother and successor, Ahmed Fuad I. The road to the palace has many spectators, and British soldiers lining the route as an honour guard. Lancers of the Sultan's bodyguard lead the parade, followed by Sultan Fuad in a landau, the Lancers of the Guard, and other carriages. The next scene is the funeral procession on foot to the Rifai Mosque, with many Egyptian mourners in black, the coffin being carried by Egyptian Marines, and British naval and military representatives (including one Australian officer) as official mourners. The coffin comes to the front of the mosque and is taken up the steps and inside. Finally, the new Sultan leaves the mosque, enters a car and drives away.

NOTES:

Title: this is taken from the shot-sheet.

REFERENCES:

shot-sheet

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Jeapes, Harold: cameraman

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

IWM

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/A

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

## LENGTH:

382 ft

## RUNNING TIME:

6 mins

## BLACK &amp; WHITE / COLOUR:

B&amp;W

## SILENT / SOUND:

Silent

## LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

None

## LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

None

## LANGUAGE OF SUBTITLES:

None

**Context**

The strategic value of Egypt to Britain grew following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 as the country now provided the main trade route to and from India. Britain assumed control of Egypt in 1882, although the country remained nominally a part of the Ottoman Empire. A flashpoint occurred at the outbreak of World War I. The Ottomans supported the Central Powers, as did Abbas II Hilmi Bey, the last Khedive of Egypt. Abbas, who had had an occasionally fractious relationship with the British since coming to power in 1892, also endorsed an attack on the Suez Canal. The British Government responded in December 1914 by declaring Egypt a British protectorate, deposing Abbas and installing in his place his uncle, Husayn Kamil. Kamil was given the title of Sultan of Egypt, the first time that the term had been used since the Ottoman conquest of the country in 1517. The real power in Egypt nevertheless lay with the British High Commissioner.

He was still at college in Vienna when the sudden death of his father raised him to the Khedivate, and he was barely of age according to Egyptian law; which required an age of eighteen for succession to the throne. For some time he did not cooperate very cordially with the United Kingdom, whose army had occupied Egypt in 1882. As he was young and eager to exercise his new power, he resented the interference of the British Agent and Consul General in Cairo, Sir Evelyn Baring, later made Lord Cromer. At the outset of his reign, Khedive Abbas surrounded himself with

a coterie of European advisers who opposed the British occupation of Egypt and Sudan and encouraged the young Khedive to challenge Cromer by replacing his ailing prime minister with a nationalist. At Cromer's behest, Lord Rosebery, the British Foreign Secretary, sent him a letter stating that the Khedive was obliged to consult the British Consul on such issues as Cabinet appointments. In January 1894 Abbas, while on an inspection tour of Egyptian army installations near the southern border, as Mahdists were still in control of Sudan, made public remarks disparaging the Egyptian army units commanded by British officers. The British commander of the Egyptian army, Sir Herbert Kitchener, immediately offered to resign. Cromer strongly supported Kitchener and pressed the Khedive and Prime Minister to retract the Khedive's criticisms of the British officers. From that time on, Abbas no longer publicly opposed the British, but secretly created, supported, and sustained the nationalist movement, which came to be led by Mustafa Kamil. As Kamil's energies were increasingly aimed at winning popular support for a National Party, Khedive Abbas publicly distanced himself from the Nationalists.

In time he came to accept British counsels. In 1899 British diplomat Alfred Mitchell-Innes was appointed Under-Secretary of State for Finance in Egypt, and in 1900 Abbas paid a second visit to Britain, during which he frankly acknowledged the great good the British had done in Egypt, and declared himself ready to follow their advice and to cooperate with the British officials administering Egyptian and Sudanese affairs. The establishment of a sound system of native justice, the great remission of taxation, the reconquest of Sudan, the inauguration of the substantial irrigation works at Aswan, and the increase of cheap, sound education, each received his formal approval. He displayed more interest in agriculture than in statecraft. His farm of cattle and horses at Qubbah, near Cairo, was a model for scientific agriculture in Egypt, and he created a similar establishment at Muntazah, near Alexandria. He married the Princess Ikbāl Hanem and had several children. Muhammad Abdul Mun'im, the heir apparent, was born on 20 February 1899.

His relations with Cromer's successor, Sir Eldon Gorst, were excellent, and they co-operated in appointing the cabinets headed by Butrus Ghali in 1908 and Muhammad Sa'id in 1910 and in checking the power of the Nationalist Party. The appointment of Kitchener to succeed Gorst in 1911 displeased Abbas, and relations between him and the British deteriorated. Kitchener often complained about "that wicked little Khedive" and wanted to depose him.

*The Times* described Kamil as 'a true patriot', who 'considered it the duty of all patriotic Egyptians to cooperate loyally with the Occupying Power' (*The Times*, 10 October 1917). The paper further stated

that the British administrators of Egypt ‘recognized the extreme value of his sound and disinterested counsel’ (*The Times*, 10 October 1917). Within Egypt itself there were those who opposed him; Kamil survived two assassination attempts in 1915, and died of natural causes in 1917.

Kamil’s son, Prince Kamal al-Din Husayn, refused to succeed him. A character in Naguib Mahfouz’s novel *Palace Walk* exclaims ‘What a fine man Prince Kamal al-Din Husayn is! Do you know what he did? He refused to ascend the throne of his late father so long as the British are in charge’ (Mahfouz, 1990, 12). Kamil’s brother, Ahmed Fuad, succeeded in his place. *The Times* said of this new ruler that there is ‘a confident expectation that he will follow the wise and patriotic example of his distinguished brother’ (*The Times*, 10 October 1917).

Kamil’s funeral was filmed by Harold Jeapes, a veteran of the British film industry and chief cameraman for the Topical Film Company. This company was founded in 1911 by his brother William Jeapes and Herbert Wrench, and it was responsible for ‘Topical Budget’ one of the three major British newsreels of the silent era (McKernan, ‘Topical Budget (1911-1931)’). In 1917 the company was taken over by the War Office Cinematograph Committee (WOCC), and provided the first war propaganda newsreel sponsored by the British Government. The WOCC was also responsible for stationing Harold Jeapes in Egypt and Palestine. Issues of the *Topical Budget* would appear bi-weekly and a standard edition would carry five subjects, each running for approximately two minutes (Keshen, 1996, 37). In March 1918 the newsreel came under the control of the newly formed Ministry of Information, before returning to private ownership in 1919. Luke McKernan has stated that the ‘official’ period of Topical Budget is ‘marked by access to footage from the war fronts’; however he adds that ‘The newsreel had to include popular, general items, even at times had to appear not to be a war newsreel at all, if it was to gain a wider acceptance, which would in turn allow it to get its messages across’ (McKernan, ‘Topical Budget: War and Propaganda’).

Following the conclusion of the war Egypt remained in control of the British. At the Imperial Conference of Prime Ministers in 1921 it was declared that ‘the Empire could survive anything else but not the loss of its main artery’ (Balfour-Paul, 2001, 498). However, Egypt was the most politically advanced country in the Middle East and there was a strong nationalist movement. In 1922 Britain’s wartime protectorate was revoked and Egypt was declared a ‘sovereign independent’ country. Under these conditions Britain retained control over defence, imperial communications and the Sudan. Fuad now adopted a different title: he became known as the King of Egypt and Sudan.



## Analysis

Harold Jeapes' long experience of making films is in evidence in *The Sultan of Egypt's Funeral*. In each of the three scenes that comprise the feature he adopts a good vantage point, enabling him to detail as much of the proceedings as possible. Only occasionally does he have to adopt a panning movement for the camera, and when he does the movement is subtle, leading to a comfortable viewing experience.

Jeapes captures the mixture of British and Egyptian leadership, and a mixture of British and Egyptian traditions. In the first scene British officers line the road to the Sultan's palace, forming a guard of honour. Their formalities are observed for a procession that is led by Egyptian troops. Although most of the soldiers and officials in this procession are Egyptian, they assume a formation that is familiar from British regal tradition. We witness synchronised troops on horseback advancing ahead of Sultan Fuad. The new sultan travels in an open-topped landau, flanked by foot soldiers. He is wearing a western-styled suit. Egyptian traditions are in evidence in the fezzes that some of the troops wear and in a scimitar flag that can be witnessed flying from one of the buildings. The crowd is not vast and is made up mostly of Egyptians, but with a few British present.

The second scene shows the funeral procession en route to the Rifai Mosque. Once again the military form a guard of honour. The funeral procession is vast and is dominated by groups of male Egyptians. It is formed of sections, each of which adopts a particular form of dress. Some sections of Egyptian mourners wear black suits and ties; others wear white shirts and fezzes; while still more wear gowns and turban-styled headgear. It is only after we have seen several hundred mourners that Hussein Kemal's coffin appears. It is larger than a conventional British coffin and appears to be covered with fabric. Later still the first British mourners can be witnessed. They too adopt matching dress: black suits and shiny top hats.

The final scene depicts the climax of this procession as the coffin arrives at the Rifai Mosque. This scene also features a guard of honour, but this time made up of Egyptian troops, who line up for Sultan Fuad as he leaves the mosque. His clothing displays a final mixture of Egyptian and British styles: he wears a black suit and carries a cane, but wears a fez upon his head.

Although this film effectively captures the scenes of the Sultan of Egypt's Funeral, background information is required for us to understand what is taking place. This is partly due to the film itself: it has no title cards to explain the footage that is on display. It is also due to the form in which the

film now exists. The version held by the Imperial War Museum features only these funeral scenes; we are missing the other Topical Budget features that might have accompanied it and there are no opening and closing credits.

**Richard Osborne (September 2009)**

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**TINS FOR INDIA**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/771>

Title Ref: Sift 22553

Director: ROY, Bimal

Prod. Country: IN

Year: 1941

1st Release: 1941

Prod. Company: New Theatres

Release Country: GB

Format: 16 35

Run Time (Mins): 8

Length: 700 Feet 213 Metres

Colour Code: B

Colour System:

Sound System: SOUN

Language: ENG

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

Credits

Director ROY, Bimal

Production Company New Theatres

Production Company Shell

Photography ROY, Bimal

**Library synopsis**

The manufacture of kerosene tins in an Indian factory.

**Synopsis**

Opening shot of palm trees and bullock cart carrying kerosene tins (62). Villages using empty tins for carrying water from the river, flattening the tins out and lining the roofs of village huts, cutting the metal up, bazaar where the empty tins are used as food containers (124). Newly-finished tins coming off a conveyor belt (140). Stages in manufacture shown – tinplates stacked up, the plates are trimmed and hemmed (245). Lettering is marked and embossed on each plate. Each plates then bent into a right angle to form two side of a tin (266). The two bent pieces are joined to form the body of the tin (317). The bottom and the top of the tin are then made and joined to the body (384). The

seams are tightened and soldered (476). A handle is made and attached to the tin by hand (541). Finished tins passing along a conveyor belt (561). Tins containing kerosene being sold in bazaars, lamps filled with oil (593). Bullock cart carrying tins (666ft)

### Context

*Tins for India* (1941) is credited as being a 'Burmah-Shell Production'. The two leading oil suppliers in India, the British-owned Burmah Oil company and the Dutch and British venture Royal Dutch Shell, formed a joint marketing operation for the sub-continent in 1928. It is, however, the hallmarks of the Shell Film Unit that are evident in this short film. Founded in 1934, the Shell Film Unit has been described as being 'the most highly regarded documentary unit based within a private corporation' (Russell). As with the majority of films made by Shell in its earlier years, *Tins for India* carries no writer credit, a factor that Stuart Legg attributes to the company's belief 'in the primacy of the visual' (Legg, 1954, 210). A significant proportion of Shell's documentaries were released to cinemas, as well as non-theatrically. *Tins for India* was reviewed in the *Monthly Film Bulletin* with regard to its suitability as an educational film (MFB, 1942, 139).

The Shell Film Unit has been noted for its employment of talented filmmakers. *Tins for India* is one of the early directorial works of Bimal Roy, who would later play a leading part in India's social-realist 'Parallel Cinema' movement and who is now regarded as having been one of Indian cinema's greatest directors. *Tins for India* was made prior to Roy's feature film directorial debut, and was produced at Calcutta's New Theatre Studios where he had gained his first film employment as an assistant cameraman ('Bimal Roy – The Silent Master (1909-1966)'). New Theatres was formed in 1931 by producer B. N. Sircar and prior to World War II had established itself as one of India's most creative film companies, known primarily for its output of 'wholesome, home spun films, enriched with melodies' (Mishra).

It has not been possible to discern whether *Tins for India* was distributed in the sub-continent as well as in the UK. The film's Indian production and the fact that it was reviewed in the British press nevertheless illustrate the international nature of the oil trade. Burmah Oil was a major shareholder in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now one of the roots of British Petroleum (BP)) and confined its operations to the Indian sub-continent where this company had no business interests. During the period of British rule the company had a monopoly on oil production in Burma. In India, Burmah Oil and Shell had established control of the market via a system of controlled prices for kerosene

(Jones, 1979, 370). G. C. Jones has argued that the price agreements ‘almost certainly led to prices in India being higher than they should have been’ (1979, 371).

### Analysis

The *Monthly Film Bulletin* noted that *Tins for India* is ‘An advertising film in which the advertisement is rather obtrusive’ (MFB, 1942, 139). However, although oil production is prominent in the film, *Tins for India* shares the tangential qualities of many of Shell’s other promotional shorts. Here it is the production of oil containers and not oil itself that forms the major subject matter. Moreover, the film is ostensibly concerned with the afterlife of the tin cans and not with their use for oil.

In this respect the film presents the activities of Burmah-Shell in a benign light. The tin cans purchased for oil go on to have a freely available ‘useful purpose’ once they have been emptied. They are shown being used as water containers, being flattened to make tiles for a roof, being cut into various articles (including lamps that will later contain oil), and being used as storage units by shopkeepers. The bulk of the film strives to show why the tins are so serviceable. In considered detail each stage of the tins’ construction is shown. This segment serves as a subtle advertisement for the dependability of the products of Burmah-Shell: ‘The durability and strength of these tins is known to every villager’.

The film is notable for the different ways in which it portrays its scenes of life in India and those of the construction of tins in the factory. Here, in keeping with the Shell Film Unit’s policy, it is primarily the use of images that conveys this difference and not the film’s dialogue. The film chooses to focus on rural India, described as ‘the real India’, for its representation of the sub-continent. This sets up an obvious contrast with the mechanised construction shown in the factory. The scenes of rural India are linked by a series of cross-fades and the opening and closing segments of village life are circular. The opening three scenes – of a bullock cart travelling on a road, a raft heading downstream, and a man carrying water containers - are shown in reverse order at the close. Their patterning is also reversed, where the participants had crossed the screen in one direction in the opening they go the other way at the close. Each of these devices helps to give the impression that rural life is eternal and unchanging. In addition, the cyclical construction of the film mirrors the endless recycling of the tin can.

The scenes in the factory are filmed in the opposite manner. Here the sharp rhythm of the machines is matched by the use of sudden cuts in the film rather than cross-fades. Moreover, the story line is

linear. Despite the fact that production of tins is ongoing, the film chooses to focus on the construction process of a can from start to finish. It gives the impression that we have witnessed the speedy construction of a tin occurring in real time. Some of these images are cut so that they cast opposing diagonals across the screen, in others a predominantly horizontal image will be followed by one that has strong verticals. This enhances the rhythmic effect and helps to reinforce the sense of industrial dynamism.

The film could be said to be offering a standardised contrast between the ancient ways of rural India and the mechanised efficiency that Europeans have introduced. Yet it is noticeable that all the workers shown in the factory are Indian; there is no white overseer. Moreover, although the primary focus is on the tin can as it evolves among the web of conveyor belts, the film does also provide some studied portraits of the Indians at work. They are also shown to be skilled operators, rather than as cogs in the machines.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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**TOURS IN SOUTHERN BENGAL - IN THE SUNDERBANS**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/468>

Title Ref: Sift 13537

Director:

Prod. Country : GB

Year: 1935

1st Release: 1935

Prod. Company:

Release Country:

Format: 16

Run Time (Mins): 9

Length: 326 Feet 99 Metres

Colour Code: B

Colour System:

Sound System: SLNT

Language:

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: N

Credits

Photography MEIKLEJOHN, W.

*Synopsis*

Everyday life and places of interest around the areas of Midnapore and Chittagong.

A steamer in the background and in the foreground an Indian stands holding a flag which says "Forest". CU steamer which shows a European woman walking along the deck (19). Some Indian boats on the river. Huts on the banks of the river. One boat is rowed along. Several more boats (34). Dense foliage across the river, through which comes another vessel (51). People walking along the shore. Some, including Indians, fishing. One catches a big fish and shows it to another (127). Some men push the boat to shore, then push it back in the water (147). "Village life - Mindapore District" Monkeys on the ground, Indians by the water. CU one particular Indian boy. Views of the village. Cows herded (198). "Crossing the Damodar River". Ox carts making their way across the river, followed by a car, which is pushed by Indians. It is then pushed up the hill on the other side (224). "Chittagong Forest Division. On the river to Cox's Bazar. A day's march Inoni to Ukhia".

People followed by loaded elephants and bicycles make their way along the coast and then up through some trees (254). Shots of the elephants taking their evening meal. They drink from buckets and eat some vegetation (275). "View from Ukhia Camp. Burma in the distance". (283). "In a sampan on the Naf river" (308). "A Chittagong Bridge". People walking across a bridge made from interlaced wooden trunks (326ft).

### *Context*

*Tours in Southern Bengal*, filmed in the mid-1930s, features scenes taking place in the Sundarbans, Midnapore District, the Damodar River, and Cox's Bazar.

The Sundarbans (or Sunderbans), covering an area that is now divided between Bangladesh and West Bengal, is the largest mangrove forest in the world. The forest is situated in the tidal delta of the Ganges. These fertile soils were subject to intense cultivation, leading to the need for systematic management of the forests. The Forest Act of 1865 declared the area a reserved forest, and in 1997 it was established as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Vajpeyi, 2001, 76-77). The area is also home to the endangered Bengal Tiger. Midnapore District is an area in Western Bengal, which was annexed to the British East India Company in 1760. The Damodar River originates in eastern India and flows westward through the states of Jharkhand and West Bengal to the estuary of the River Hoogly. Cox's Bazar is a fishing port that is known for its beach, which at 125km in length is claimed to be the longest natural sandy beach in the world ('World's Longest Beach Hidden in Bangladesh').

Bengal played a prominent role in the Indian independence movement; many prominent nationalist leaders were Bengali and the area witnessed much revolutionary activity. The civil disturbances that took place in the state in the early 1930s prompted the Governor of Bengal, Sir Stanley Jackson, to put in place a number of restrictive ordinances. In the face of continued uprisings these were ratified by his successor, Sir John Anderson (Wheeler-Bennett, 1962, 135).

William Meiklejohn, who shot this amateur footage, was an employee of the Imperial Forestry Service, which he joined in 1910. This organisation was set up in 1867, leading to the 1872 creation of the Chittagong Forest Division, which is featured in this film ('Bangladesh Forest Department'). Prior to 1926 entry to the Imperial Forestry Service was restricted to those who had received training at Oxbridge or the University of Edinburgh ('Indian Forest Service').



*Analysis*

Describing William Meiklejohn's amateur films, Robin Baker has stated that 'he had a better eye for composition than most' and that he was capable of delivering 'strongly evocative portraits' (Baker). This is certainly true of this collection of scenes filmed in southern Bengal; Meiklejohn has a talent for capturing human and animal life, as well as landscapes and buildings.

The scenes of village life in the Midnapore District provide an elegant study of the people and homesteads in the region. Meiklejohn films a variety of individual and group portraits of the villagers. In each case they are deliberately posed for the camera. Meiklejohn frames these portraits well and selects good backdrops from the landscape to complement each scene. What is notable is the comfort of the people in front of the camera and the dignity that Meiklejohn allows them. His filming of the villagers' homes is also thoughtfully undertaken. The camera lingers on an image of the village street, enabling the viewer to realise that this is a deliberate architectural study. He also takes a reverse shot of this original image, giving a sense of the spatial dimensions of the scene.

Meiklejohn is also attracted to the wildlife of the region, in particular when it can provide him with whimsical images. He films monkeys at play in the gardens of an elegant white house, and he captures crabs scuttling across the sandy beach at Cox's Bazar. In addition, he provides various studies of the Sunderbans, capturing its wide rivers and secluded inlets, as well as the variety of river craft that are used on its waters.

It is, however, his scenes of Indians and British together in the landscape of Bengal that deliver the most evocative portraits. There is a good deal of interaction in evidence. Meiklejohn films a small party of elegantly dressed British men and women who approach some local fishermen in the Sunderbans and ask them about their catch. Later the same group of British people can be seen in a rowing boat which Indians push up a muddy river bank for them, it is then let loose to slide into the waters. Similarly there is a scene in which a large group of Indians help the British party by pushing their motor car across the expanse of Damador River.

Meiklejohn presents a world removed from the nationalist agitation in the Bengal region. In different ways his studies of the Midnapore district villagers and the scenes of British and Indians interacting present the two nations as being at ease in one another's presence. While it is true that in both instances Indians commonly take the subservient role, what comes across most strongly from Meiklejohn's films is his wonderment at life in the subcontinent. These are the studies of a man who

is enraptured with what he sees. Towards the end of this film he captures a stunning, never to be repeated image. He films from a position on Cox's beach that enables him to let a surprising procession of characters enter his frame. First to be seen are the workers of the Chittagong Forest Division, dressed in their uniforms, and walking together near the water's edge; in step behind them there is a group of five elephants, loaded with equipment and ridden by Indians; and then, once the elephants have walked out of view, there is the unexpected image of a group of British cyclists, dressed in their fine clothes and riding their bicycles down the beach.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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'World's Longest Beach Hidden in Bangladesh', <http://www.smh.com.au/news/travel/the-worlds-longest-beach/2007/01/31/1169919381993.html>.

<b>Film Number</b>	COI 370
<b>Film Title</b>	<b>TRUE BEARING</b>
<b>Web Address</b>	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2497">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2497</a>
<b>Production Date</b>	1961
<b>Production Country</b>	GB
<b>Production Sponsor</b>	Central Office of Information Air Ministry
<b>Production Company</b>	Editorial Film Productions

### Synopsis

Dramatised documentary using a story about faulty navigational radar to illustrate RAF life and work in the Far East.

The RAF Staging Post at Gan in the Maldives discovers a malfunction in the CRDF (Cathode Ray Direction Finder) hut, making it difficult to give aircraft (such as a Bristol Britannia) a true bearing. At Far Eastern HQ, RAF, Corporal Mitchell has just obtained married quarters, and his wife is flying to Singapore that day. Mitchell's wife is seen onboard a Transport Command Comet. (Reel 2) The mess at RAF Changi: Mitchell sees his friends Nobby and Ellis. A Flight Sergeant informs Mitchell that he is assigned the job of flying to Gan to repair the faulty CRDF. He reluctantly agrees. At the barracks, he packs, visits the quartermaster to pick up a 6KC oscillator (necessary equipment) and asks Nobby and Ellis to meet his wife for him. A Comet flight to Gan: Mitchell is picked up by Corporal Barnett. they drive out to the CRDF hut in Land Rover. The 6KC oscillator is replaced. Meanwhile, Ellis and Nobby are in Singapore. (Reel 3) Repairs continue; a flaw is found in aerial and fixed. Mrs Mitchell seen in flight. Mitchell himself scrounges a lift on a Shackleton back to Far Eastern HQ; the plane checks bearing using the CRDF: it is a true bearing, Mitchell's mission has been a success. He flies home ready to greet his wife.

## Notes

Although RAF recruitment is not mentioned, the gushing commentary ('Singapore. Far Eastern headquarters of the Royal Air Force... unrivalled surroundings of comfort and climate') and the endless shots of scenery and lifestyle present obvious temptations for prospective RAF officers. Technical: tramlines throughout most of print.

## References

COI Files in Production Office - music cue sheet, full synopsis, commentary script

## Production Credits

Mellor, James: producer  
Holt, Seth: director  
Arapoff, Cyril: photography  
Cooke, Malcolm: film editor  
Byers, Isabelle: continuity  
Edwards, Rex: script

## Film/Video Format

P 1/35/A

## Number of Reels

3

## Length

2627 ft

## Running Time

29 mins

## Black & White/Colour

Colour

## Silent/Sound

comopt

## Language of Soundtrack

English

## Language of Main Titles

English

## Language of Subtitles

None

**Context Date** 1961 (ca)

**Index:** GB.F

**Units/Organisations**

**Index: Objects** aircraft, British - transport: Avro Shackleton  
 aircraft, British - transport: Bristol Britannia  
 aircraft, British - transport: De Havilland Comet  
 operations, British air - maintenance  
 equipment, British air - navigational: radar (CRDF)  
 society, British air - domestic: Far East  
 society, Singaporean - ethnic

**Index: Places** Singapore  
 Maldiv Islands & Gan <RAF Station>

**Index: Concepts** propaganda

**Access Conditions** IWM

### *Context*

*True Bearing* centres on two Royal Air Force bases in Southeast Asia: the Far East Air Force Headquarters at RAF Changi, Singapore, and the RAF station on the island of Gan (Seenu Atoll) in the Maldives.

Monitoring the build-up of Japanese military power in the inter-war period, Singapore was identified as a base from which Britain could protect its colonies in Southeast Asia. Royal Air Force Singapore was formed in 1930 and a large dock for the navy was formally opened in 1938. The Japanese nevertheless captured Singapore in February 1942, a defeat that Churchill described as ‘the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history’. Following the War the British military rebuilt their base on the island. Royal Air Force Singapore re-emerged as the Far East Air Force, the command organisation responsible for RAF assets in the east of Asia.

Gan had been earmarked by the British military during World War II. In 1941 a naval base was constructed on the island, prompting the transfer of the local population to neighbouring islands. The RAF superseded the Navy in 1957 and used Gan as one of the staging posts for flights between Britain and Singapore.

In both of these territories British military presence outlasted British political control. Singapore became a self-governing state within the British Empire in June 1959, achieving full independence in 1963. The British military did not withdraw from the island until 1971, however (Stockwell, 2001, 488). The Maldivian Islands were administered as a British protectorate from 1887 until 1965. Gan nevertheless remained under RAF control until 1976, when British Forces withdrew. The Atoll was handed back to the Maldivian government and its airstrip has now been converted into Gan International Airport.

*True Bearing* was shot in these locations in 1961. It is credited as 'A Central Office Information Film for the Air Ministry' and appears to have been planned as a recruitment film. The director of the film, Seth Holt, developed his career at Ealing Studios where he had served as editor or assistant editor on many famous films. He directed one film there, *Nowhere to Go* (1958), before the studios closed. At the time of working on *True Bearing* he was emerging as a director of horror films at Hammer studios. Holt was regarded as a fine talent who failed to deliver his full potential. *The Times* described him as 'a master that might have been' (*The Times*, 8 December 1984). *True Bearing* was not widely reviewed, but received notice in *Kine Weekly* as being a 'direct little episode which skilfully embraces most aspects of service abroad, and provides interesting glimpses of the many facets of life in a part of the world in which every prospect pleases. Very good' (*KW*, 28 December 1961).

### *Analysis*

*True Bearing* sells the attractions of the life for RAF recruits in the Far East, particularly in Singapore where 'some 7000 Royal Air Force men with their wives and children spend two-and-a-half years in unrivalled surroundings of comfort and climate'. It also sells the attractions of their work: war is nowhere to be seen in this film, instead it features a display of the efficiency of military machinery. Radars, aerals and aeroplanes are all lovingly detailed by both the camerawork and the script.

This film has high production values. It employs actors in the leading roles, the cinematography is of a high standard, and the music is cleverly sequenced (an aptly titled piece called 'El Dorado' accompanies shots of the beaches of Gan; a jaunty jazz piece is used for pleasurable excursions in

Singapore). It also uses devices familiar from theatrical motion pictures. For example, lingering shots of an aeroplane's control panels indicate that something is likely to go wrong. Similarly, the attention that is paid to Corporal Mitchell leads us to believe that he is the prime candidate to fix things. Nevertheless, this is resolutely not a disaster movie. The emphasis is not on machines malfunctioning, but instead on how well the RAF can deal with problems. Serviceable equipment and the engineering skills of the force are put on display.

The film is as carefully constructed as the RAF's equipment. Scenes lead directly on from one another and their various plot devices interlock. Corporal Mitchell is moving into new married quarters in Singapore and awaiting the arrival of his wife from England. Mitchell's visit to his new quarters provides an excuse to put the elegant RAF compound on display. He drives through it in his classic car, accompanied by the jazzy soundtrack, and is halted by a charming local lollipop man. Once at his new quarters he is presented with a beautiful Singapore girl who wishes to stay on as helper; and we are told that she is a 'real treasure, a marvellous washer and keeps the place like a new pin'. His wife, meanwhile, is onboard her plane and is worried about her new destination. This enables the flight assistant to inform her that 'you live like blooming potentates!' and to claim that eating at the RAF's canteen is 'like dining at the Ritz'. We then cut to the canteen, where we see abundant food being served by a large team of locals in crisp white uniforms. The menu, reassuringly, features 'Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding' and 'Lancashire Hot Pot'.

Corporal Mitchell's removal to the island of Gan to mend the equipment serves several narrative purposes. It provides us with a chance to see his engineering skills and the range of RAF equipment. It also elicits a portrayal of the easy-going camaraderie of various RAF teams. His journey facilitates aerial shots of the beauty of Singapore and of the enticing island of Gan at sunset and sunrise. Finally, his removal provides an excuse to send some of Mitchell's comrades on a shopping trip in his stead. This last device is subtle. In place of the steady and married Corporal Mitchell we get to see young recruits who are playful and single. Their excursion introduces us to attractive WAAFs at the army swimming pool and on the beach. It also features a montage sequence of Singapore, where we witness the beauty of the city and of its people. We also see that these people are on hand to serve the young recruits: they are obligingly pedalled around the city on a trishaw by a middle-aged local.

In *True Bearing* the people of Singapore, like the city itself, serve as an attractive backdrop and as providers of comfort to the men of the RAF. The Far East and life in the services are pictured as

being idyllic. Active combat does not impinge on this film and nor does local politics. As such, this film reflects Britain's withdrawal from active involvement in governing this region.

**Richard Osborne (July 2009)**

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Waymark, Peter, 'A master that might have been', *The Times*, 8 December 1984, 17.



**The TRUTH WILL OUT**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/1057>

Title Ref: Sift 22559

Director:

Prod. Country: IN

Year: 1930

1st Release: 1930

Prodn. Company:

Release Country:

Format: 16

Run Time (Mins): 20 [3 mins remain]

Length:

Colour Code: B

Colour System:

Sound System: SLNT

Language:

Dubbed: N

Subtitled: Y

Credits:

*Photography* JOHNSTON, R.H.G.

*Synopsis*

DRAMA-DOCUMENTARY. An Indian villager supports a Congress riot, is arrested, tried, sentenced and reprieved. Anti-Congress propaganda film made by R.H.G. Johnston, a District Officer in the United Provinces in the late 1920s and 1930s. Archive copy incomplete.

"Truth Will Out". MLS two men herding bullocks in a barren field (26). "Jainti Prasad" (40). MCU Jainti Prasad, he has a white moustache and wears a turban. He smiles at the camera (52). "Himmat Singh" (61). MCU Himmat Singh, a younger man, also wears a moustache and turban. He smiles at the camera (83). MCU the two men with the animals - they move away from the bullocks and engage in earnest conversation (114). A hand holding a poster with Hindi or Urdu script (121). "Come to the Congress meeting" (134). The two men continue their debate nearer to camera; Prasad is reluctant to go (149). "Congress makes mischief. I will not come" (172). Jainti Prasad walks away. Himmat Singh shows frustration and returns to herd the bullocks, leading them off (188). "The Congress Agitator Arrives" (198ft).

Note: Titles in Hindi, Urdu and English.

### *Context*

R.H.G. Johnston, a District Officer in the Agra region of the United Provinces, produced *The Truth Will Out* in 1930. It represents a localised response to the civil disobedience campaign of the Indian National Congress (INC).

The period of civil disobedience lasted from 1930-34 and marked an important turning point for the INC, the largest of India's own political parties. Guided once more by Mahatma Gandhi, the party rejected the declaration made in 1929 by Lord Irwin, the Viceroy of India, which proposed Dominion status for India. They also declined to attend his Round Table conferences, held to discuss the future of the sub-continent. The campaign of civil disobedience was undertaken instead, with the objective of gaining complete independence from Britain. This method of protest had distinct advantages for the INC. According to Judith Brown, the campaign 'increased the political significance and prestige of Congress as an all-India organization, enabled it to re-forge links with a wide span of Indians operating at different political levels, and increased the leverage of its central leaders, particularly Gandhi, over their countrymen and the British' (Brown, 1994, 274).

Beginning with Gandhi's famous march from Sabarmati to the coast at Dandi, where he illegally produced salt in protest against government tax, the campaign was adaptable to local issues throughout India. In the United Provinces protests incorporated the picketing of shops, the breaking of forest laws, and the flying of the INC flag over schools and municipal buildings (Cell, 1992, 168). Here the government responded by declaring the INC illegal, leading to the imprisonment of around 750 members by June 1930 (Cell, 1992, 169). It was in the latter half of 1930 that the protests took on a rural dimension for the first time. United Provinces was home to the INC leader Jawaharlal Nehru, who was imprisoned in October 1930, in part for encouraging rural tenants to withhold their rents. This means of protest was widely supported, not least because a slump in agricultural prices made it difficult for tenants to pay any money in the first place. It has been argued that in Agra, even before the slump, 'the average peasant lived at or perilously near the margin of subsistence' (Cell, 1992, 183). The withdrawal of this money posed a direct problem for provincial government: it was via a percentage of the landlord's rent revenue that they gained taxes from the peasantry.

District Officers, in their role as Deputy Commissioners, were responsible for the general administration of their areas. They also served as District Magistrates and were in charge of the collection of taxes. R.H.G. Johnston, therefore, would have been intimately connected with the problems posed by the INC campaign in his district. The governor of United Provinces, Sir Malcolm Hailey, also became increasingly attuned to the situation, allowing his District Officers recourse to specialist publicity officers and film propaganda as part of a publicity campaign to encourage rural landlords to act more responsibly towards their tenants (Hunt and Harrison, 1980, 192). R.H.G Johnston appears to have taken it upon himself to address the problems presented by the INC, however. His film addresses the Indian peasantry rather than landlords, and it was made in 1930, four years before Hailey's campaign.

Ultimately, the INC proved to be the more effective propagandists. Hunt and Harrison have argued that 'When the ban on Congress was lifted in 1934, it was the Congress workers, cycling through the countryside spreading the message that Congress rule would reduce tenant rents [...], who won the support of the peasant' (Hunt and Harrison, 1980, 192). As evidence they cite the success of the INC in the 1934 elections.

### *Analysis*

Although only a short segment of *The Truth Will Out* remains, the film still provides an interesting item for study. It says much about the value that the British authorities in India accorded to communications, both their own and that of the opposition, intended to influence opinion. It also provides evidence of the position and perceptions of the District Officer. G.P. Haig, who served as a District Officer in the United Provinces between 1931-1947, outlined what he maintained were widely shared beliefs among his colleagues: 'Our main responsibility was the maintenance of "Pax Britannica" (law and order) inside a unitary system of Government. We were against Congress, who were trying to chuck the British out' (Hunt and Harrison, 1980, 187). This bias is evident in Johnston's film.

The remaining section of footage is the film's opening, which features an assault on INC propaganda. A rural peasant, Himmat Singh, has in his possession a Congress handbill, which advertises a forthcoming political meeting. He shows it to a co-worker, Jainti Prasad, who argues, via a title card, that 'Congress makes mischief. I will not come'. Their argument gradually becomes physical until, eventually, they go their separate ways. The violent nature of Singh appears to be

borne out in the rest of the film. The remainder is said to portray Singh's participation in a Congress riot, followed by his subsequent arrest, sentence and reprieve (Davidson).

Although *The Truth Will Out* protests at the mischief caused by the INC, it could be argued that it is Johnston's film that is duplicitous. It falsifies the nature of the protests in the United Provinces: those in the rural districts were centred on withholding rents, and those in the towns and cities were not commonly destructive. John W. Cell has stated that the district had 'no violent outbursts on the scale of those in Bombay, Peshawar, or Chittagong' (Cell, 1992, 169). The conditions that provided the INC with the means for their agitation are not falsified, however. The primitive methods of farming that are on display in this film are undoubtedly those of the rural poor.

In order to address this rural audience Johnston's employs the most basic of film techniques. The principal characters are usually kept within the frame and they are introduced to the audience by means of lingering head-and-shoulders shots. The rudimentary nature of Johnston's production sometimes works against his aims, however. The action is commonly shot from a distance which is not conducive to the drama. His actors are not capable of remaining in character: during the head-and-shoulders shots they break into smiles, and in the midst of their heated argument there is a moment in which Jainti Prasad breaks off and waves happily at the camera. Despite the rudimentary nature of the film, it is notable that Johnston presumes the literacy of his audience. The remaining footage features several title cards, each of which is written in three separate languages. In addition, at one point the camera pans down the INC handbill, presupposing that the audience will be reading it.

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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FILM TITLE:

**UNIVERSAL NEWS**

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/6645>

PRODUCTION DATE:

10/1942

PRODUCTION COUNTRY:

GB

PRODUCTION COMPANY:

Universal

FULL SUMMARY:

- I. "News from Ceylon." Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, Commander-in-Chief of Ceylon, and Sir Henry Turnbull, Officer in Command, are escorted by elephants when they visit an ancient Buddhist temple (Kamalia ?). Monks watch the procession. The Admiral removes his shoes, a sign that "thus too does Britain show her respect for freedom of worship, which such other freedoms she is fighting for". Close-up views of temple friezes. Wall paintings at the rock fortress of Sigiri.
- II. (Maharajah of Nawanagar speaks to Baroda Squadron on 14/10/1942.) Maharajah of Nawanagar, "one of India's most vital provinces", visits the Baroda Squadron (No 124 at Tangmere) and steps out of a Spitfire before addressing the men (live sound). Speaking informally he promises to visit the squadron at its ordinary routine and answer any questions about his country. "The real India is your brothers-in-arms, two million of whom have volunteered and they will say that those brown boys are doing their job and doing it very well. Like India is the brightest jewel in the British crown, so the brightest jewel in Baroda is the Baroda Squadron. God bless you and good luck!"

ACCESS CONDITIONS:

LPU

FILM / VIDEO FORMAT:

P 1/35/A

NUMBER OF REELS:

1

LENGTH:

414 ft

RUNNING TIME:

5 mins

BLACK & WHITE / COLOUR:

B&W

SILENT / SOUND:

comopt

LANGUAGE OF SOUNDTRACK:

English

LANGUAGE OF MAIN TITLES:

English

LANGUAGE OF SUBTTLES:

None

### *Context*

Universal News was one of five newsreel companies operating in Britain at the outbreak of World War II. Between them these companies commanded a weekly domestic audience of 20 million, with the films of Gaumont-British receiving the largest circulation (Smith, 1976, 112). Gaumont-British also assumed editorial control of Universal News, which was an American-owned company, and was considered to be the poor relation of the other newsreels (Smith, 1976, 112). This edition of Universal News was released in November 1942. Its two stories concern India and Ceylon, countries that had different relationships with Britain during World War II.

Rather than support the Allies, the leading Indian political party, the Indian National Congress (INC), resigned from government at the outbreak of the War. 1942 had seen this situation intensify. With Japan now representing a threat to India, the British Cabinet saw increased need for the INC's involvement in government. Consequently, the 'Cripps Offer' was made, promising Dominion status for India in return for support during the War. The INC's rejection of this offer led instead to the open rebellion of the 'Quit India' movement and the subsequent imprisonment of the party's leaders.

There was, however, also support within India for the War. The Indian Army grew from about 200,000 men in 1939 to about 900,000 by the end of 1941 (Jackson, 2006, 363). Furthermore, Ian Copland suggests that groups such as the Muslim League and the Indian Princes 'flourished in the vacuum' opened up by the withdrawal of the INC from government. The War benefited the Princes in various ways: it generated a martial atmosphere to which they were suited; their states benefited

economically from the demand for war materials; and they could once again demonstrate their loyalty to the Crown, thus redeeming themselves for backtracking on proposals for a federation of their Princely states with British India (Copland, 1997, 183-85).

The Prince depicted in this newsreel, Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji, the Maharajah of Nawanagar, was among those who donated to the War cause, in his case providing funds for a torpedo training school (Copland, 1987, 185). In 1938 he became chancellor of the Chamber of Princes (COP), the body by which the Princes lobbied their cause to the government of India. He was regarded as having a gift for politics, and was responsible for enlarging the COP and improving its finances (Copland, 1987, 189-90). During the War he urged rulers visiting Britain to stress 'the importance of the Princely cause' (Copland, 1997, 192). His loyalty was rewarded with governmental appointments: during the War he was a member of the Imperial War Cabinet and the National Defence Council ('Nawanagar'). Nevertheless, he was also supportive of nationalist aims in India, and following independence was one of the first Princes to accede his state to the new government.

The political leadership of Ceylon co-operated with the British during the War. Following the victories of Japan in south-east Asia in early 1942, Ceylon had an important military role to play. Providing a vantage point to both coasts of India, Churchill considered the island as a 'key point we have to hold' (Jackson, 2006, 307). The island became an armed camp and its strategic importance led to the civilian government being subordinated to military command, with Sir Geoffrey Layton serving as Commander-in-Chief. The civilian government, led by the governor Sir Andrew Caldecot, offered its full support in the War, and directed the island's resources and manpower towards the campaign.

The differing political attitudes in India and Ceylon helped both countries to achieve independence after the War. Judith Brown argues that in India the Cripps Offer was 'the point at which the British departure after the war became inevitable' (Brown, 1994, 328). In Ceylon, on the other hand, the support given by its political leaders led British officials, including Layton, Caldecot and Lord Louis Mountbatten, to support the cause for independence (Ashton, 2001, 461).

### *Analysis*

Despite being markedly different in terms of style, mode of address and location, the two stories featured in this edition of Universal News tell corresponding stories of the co-operation between Britain and the colonies during the War.

The first section is filmed in Ceylon, and features Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton and Sir Henry Parnell, Officer-in-Command, being conducted by locals on a visit to the Buddhist temple of Kelaniya and the fortress of Sigiriya. The beauty of 'lovely Ceylon' is stressed and the film focuses on the island's exotic traditions and crafts. There are images of decorated elephants, tribal dancing, and temple carvings. In this film these traditions are lauded (oddly, as being 'so typical of the impressiveness of India's religious life'). They are also depicted for propaganda purposes. On the one hand, the commentary stresses that 'picturesque ceremonies' have not fallen into disuse, 'even during wartime'. On the other hand, the officials' visits are portrayed as being reflective of British understanding of foreign practices. This is spelt out directly when Layton removes his shoes at the Buddhist temple. The commentary states, 'thus, too, does Britain show her respect for freedom of worship'. The Ceylonese support for the Allied cause is also underlined. We first witness Layton and Parnell being garlanded with flowers by a local official; the streets are lined with well-wishers on their walk to the temple; and the commentary singles out a Buddhist monk who 'saved a crashed airman's life during a Jap attack on Colombo'. This monk is not singled out by the camera, however. Layton and Parnell are the only people to be individualised and named in this section of the news report. This slightly undercuts the portrayal of reciprocal understanding; the Ceylonese, for the most part, are given the role of supportive crowds.

Roles are reversed in the second section of the film. After opening with shots of the Maharajah of Nawangar arriving at a British airfield, followed by his inspection of the Baroda squadron, the bulk of this report consists of the Maharajah making an address. Here it is the British who are cast as extras: the squadron is reduced to the role of a passive, and invisible, audience. During the speech the camera is concentrated directly upon the Maharajah (while four senior officers listen respectfully behind him) and, unusually for a news report of this period, his words are captured directly on the film. The cinema audience is provided with the squadron's point-of-view. The Maharajah speaks of the Indian support for the War, telling the audience that Indian servicemen are their 'brothers in arms', and that 'two millions of them have volunteered and they will readily die for the same cause as yourselves'. He also imagines the audience's reaction when they see Indians in action: 'you will say that all brown boys are doing their job and doing it very well'.

In itself, this footage of an Indian guest assuming seniority over a British squadron provides a powerful image of the understanding that has developed during the War. However, what makes the Maharajah's words more interesting is their (almost) unspoken background: the rebellion of the Quit



India movement. He never mentions the movement directly, but does let slip that ‘you may have read in the paper all sorts of nonsense – that’s not the real India’. It is the Maharajah’s duty – and the film’s – to inform the audience what the real India is all about.

**Richard Osborne (February 2010)**

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<b>Film Number</b>	WPN 51
<b>Film Title</b>	<b>WAR PICTORIAL NEWS NO 51</b>
<b>Web Address</b>	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3549">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3549</a>
<b>Production Date</b>	20/04/1942
<b>Production Country</b>	GB
<b>Maker</b>	
<b>Production Company</b>	War Pictorial News

### Synopsis

India. A map of India shows the provinces, Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. The commentary introduces this edition devoted entirely to matters Indian by stressing the contrasts found in the landscape between temples and steel mills. Smoke belches from chimneys at one of India's steel foundries as the commentary highlights the fact that India is now ranked the eighth industrial power in the world. External views of a steel foundry follow showing the railway lines that supply it with raw materials. An Indian foundry worker wearing protective glasses operates a blast furnace in the interior of a foundry building.

The commentary states that although industry is important, the bulk of the Indian population still work the land. Wheat threshing and grain milling sequences follow. Indian men wash clothes in the open air using wooden vats. Back at the steel foundry, molten steel is carefully poured into holding containers, pressed and then transported along a conveyor belt to the next stage of the industrial process. Elsewhere steel has corrugations moulded into its surface by means of a massive industrial press. Other male foundry operatives tackle the more detailed jobs, making rifle and machine gun bullets. A boy worker seated at a bench hand sorts and packs bullets with amazing speed and dexterity. Elsewhere at a textiles factory, looms spin material that will eventually produce essential war goods such as uniforms, tents and wound dressings. Pulp is rolled and shaped in a paper factory as an Indian factory worker inspects the finished product during the quality control process.

The commentary highlights the Indian military contribution to the war effort, especially in the fighting in Eritrea. A South African gun crew bombard Italian positions with a BL 26cwt 6-in howitzer with pneumatic tyres. Italian infantry and local Eritrean levies surrender to Commonwealth forces. Indian sappers use pneumatic drills and picks to clear an Italian earth and rock roadblock. A mule train led by Indian infantry winds its way up a rocky incline bringing supplies to the front line troops. Indian troops drive 15cwt 4X2 GS (Indian) Chevrolet trucks across a rugged landscape. Elsewhere, a ship without its superstructure is launched down a slipway as the commentary stresses the hazards posed to shipping by the Japanese even in Indian home waters. An Indian naval vessel fires depth charges from its stern which explode creating a large water spout. At an aircraft maintenance depot Indian mechanics inspect the tyre bays and under wing area of an unidentifiable aircraft. The commentary states that many young Indians have taken their wings in the cause of freedom. Sikh infantry march along a dusty track on the outskirts of Cairo with pyramids evident in the background. An Indian Army instructor watches his pupil firing a vehicle mounted Bren .303-in light machine gun in the anti-aircraft role. Sikh troops run to 15cwt 4X2 GS (Indian) Chevrolet trucks at the start of a desert patrol. Indian troops run past a disabled Universal Carrier carrying Lee-Enfield .303-in Mk III rifles with fixed bayonets. Indian troops armed with Lee-Enfields apparently force a German tank crewman to surrender. The German climbs out of a PzKpfw III carrying a large jerry can of water and walks off escorted by his Indian captors. The commentary states that from the first days of the war, India has demonstrated that her future is linked with that of the British Empire over scenes of sheet metal being pressed in a steel foundry and Sikh troops marching.

### Context

The newsreel series *War Pictorial News* was compiled by the Cairo Office of the Ministry of Information for exhibition to allied troops serving in the Middle East and the Mediterranean as well as to local civilian audiences. Footage was largely assembled from items used by newsreel companies in England but was provided with a new commentary, with versions being issued in English, French and Arabic as deemed appropriate. The series ran between September 1940 and August 1946. It was renamed *World Pictorial News* in October 1945.

Released 4 April 1942, number 51 in the series is a special issue devoted entirely to India. The film's focus is on the country's contribution to the war effort, outlining India's increased industrial output and the activities of her troops.

At the outbreak of hostilities with Germany, Viceroy Lord Linlithgow offended many Indian nationalists by declaring that because Britain was at war, India was at war. There was, however, soon a vast increase in the number of Indian troops: numbers increased from approximately 200,000 in 1939 to 900,000 by the end of 1941 (Jackson, 2006, 363). These troops and military resources were destined for East Africa, the Western Desert and Italy. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 the need for increased Indian support became more pressing. The sub-continent itself was now under threat. Indian troops reached a peak of about 2,600,000 in 1945 (Jackson, 2006, 363).

*War Pictorial News* 51 contrasts the traditional farming methods of the vast majority of India's population with the skills that were required to man the burgeoning industrial sector. India's economy remained overwhelmingly rural – the proportion of the population employed in agriculture and related occupations remained steady at roughly 70% throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Brown, 1994, 254). An expansion of industry is nevertheless indicated by the expansion of major urban centres: in 1931 only 2.86% of the population lived in cities of 100,000 and over; by 1941 this figure had risen to 4.25% (Brown, 1994, 254). Industrial growth during the war was determined by military needs: all mill production of textiles, all factory production of leather and footwear, approximately three-quarters of steel output and over two-fifths of paper production was destined for the war effort (Jackson, 2006, 358). By 1943 India was third only to Britain and Canada in producing goods for the Allied cause (Jackson, 2006, 358).

As well as necessitating the support of India during the Second World War, the triumphs of Japanese forces also 'undermined the myth of European invincibility' (Jeffery, 2001, 319). Prior to the war the nationalist movement in India had gained increasing support and power. The Indian National Congress party (INC) witnessed its first political victories, emerging as the dominant party in the 1937 elections. In 1939, however, the party's government members resigned their positions, protesting at Viceroy Linlithgow's declaration of war. In March 1942 Sir Stafford Cripps, Leader of the House of Commons, was despatched to India in order to develop a proposal that would help ensure nationalist support during the forthcoming battles against the Japanese. The 'Cripps Offer' stated that, in return for co-operation during the war, India could have full Dominion status or the option to secede from the Commonwealth once the war had concluded. There was also a proviso that no part of India could be forced to join the new state. Disliking this opt-out clause the INC and the Muslim League both rejected the offer in April 1942. This action led to the open rebellion of the

‘Quit India’ movement. The Cripps Offer, according to Judith Brown, was ‘the point at which the British departure after the war became inevitable’ (Brown, 1994, 328).

### Analysis

The 51<sup>st</sup> edition of *War Pictorial News* delivers a reassuring portrait of Indian backing for the war effort. The film opens with some background detail about India. A spinning globe stops to reveal the country’s position among the continents. We are informed that this is a land of ‘strange contrasts – from temple to steel’ (here the camera pans from one to the other). The primary purpose of speaking of contrasts, however, is to illustrate the fact that the ‘primitive’ methods of India’s agriculture are matched by the ‘up-to-the-minute’ procedures of the country’s factories. Scenes of labour-intensive agriculture are intercut with imposing shots of factory machinery, which dwarves the few workers who are pictured. Mirroring this transition the backing music for the film switches from Indian for the rural scenes to rousing and triumphant western music for the images of the factories.

The narrative stresses India’s ranking among the industrial powers; her wealth in raw materials; the craftsmanship of local workers (easily adaptable to the ‘intricate machines of modern industry’); and the fact the factory operatives have the ‘strength of knowing they are forging weapons that may soon be used in defence of their country’. The sheer size of India’s population is also mentioned. Following this we move to more densely populated factory scenes, depicting operatives at work on the ‘more delicate machines’ in a munitions factory. Eventually we arrive at a young employee who is wrapping a parcel of bullets at tremendous (possibly manipulated) speed. His actions are the first to be directly addressed by the narrator, who informs us that ‘He’s only a little fellow but he’s good and there are thousands like him’.

The latter half of the film depicts the two halves of India’s industrial-military complex. The ‘essential’ manufacture of paper and cotton is shown and we are informed that India’s industries have reached ‘war production speed’. At this point the film is more speedily intercut and the tempo of the music increases. We see layered shots of paper production, scenes from the munitions factory, and the return of the ‘little fellow’ with his advanced wrapping techniques. Next we are informed that this output is matched by ‘thousands of fighting men’, at which point the film switches to a panned shot of the serried tents of Indian forces. In these scenes of the Eritrean campaign the parallels with factory production are continued. We see Indian soldiers employing industrial procedures as they drill into mountain rocks to create a pathway. Later there is a more

direct correspondence between manufacture and military. Scenes of shipbuilding are followed by scenes shot aboard a Royal Indian Navy vessel, which is 'manned by her own sons'. The film closes with a further parallel: we return to the use of increased tempo and layered shots. Where the first montage had depicted industry this one illustrates the War machine. The scenes are of warships, aircraft and marching troops.

*War Pictorial News 51* is reciprocal in its nature: it depicts India's support for the war effort and it offers its own support for the effort that is being made. The film presents a sub-continent united behind the allied cause. Scenes of the forces show Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, and they depict Indians marching alongside British troops. The conclusion of the narrative reveals the film's underlying purpose: 'From the first days of the war India has overwhelmingly demonstrated that her future is linked with that of the British Empire. Her co-operation has been wholeheartedly given. The inability of Indian leaders to accept Britain's recent proposals is purely a political issue. Between the war purposes of the British government and the Indian people there are no differences. Both are determined to defeat Japanese aggression and to achieve ultimate victory.'

**Richard Osborne**

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<b>Film Number</b>	WPN 153
<b>Film Title</b>	<b>WAR PICTORIAL NEWS NO 153</b>
<b>Web Address</b>	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3465">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3465</a>
<b>Production Date</b>	10/4/1944
<b>Production Country</b>	GB
<b>Production Sponsor</b>	Ministry of Information, Middle East
<b>Production Company</b>	War Pictorial News

### Synopsis

I. INDIA. An unidentified merchant ship is berthed in Calcutta Docks having arrived with a consignment of Australian wheat in support of relief operations in famine-stricken Bengal. Grain is unloaded by hoist from the hold and stored on a jetty. Indian dockworkers load wheat sacks onto railway wagons and into the holds of waiting river barges. River boat *Gouree* acts as a tug to pull the laden barges. Indian Army Sikh troops sit in the barges to guard the wheat consignment from possible looters as they travel to the famine area. On arrival, Sikh troops are shown providing famine relief, issuing food and cooking on open fires for emaciated Bengali children. An Indian Army medical detachment arrives by soft-skinned vehicle at a Bengali village during famine relief operations. Indian Army doctors tend to Bengali children on stretchers and in a hospital ward. A Lockheed (C-60 Lodestar ?) military transport aircraft carrying the Viceroy of India Lord Wavell taxis to a halt at a Calcutta airfield. On disembarkation from the aircraft, the Viceroy is greeted by Acting Governor of Bengal, Sir Thomas Rutherford. Elsewhere the Viceroy and Lady Wavell talk to Bengali villagers queuing for inoculations. Grain sacks are loaded onto soft-skins which later drive off, presumably to the famine-stricken areas. The soft-skins have the legend 'Food for the People' written in English and Bengali on their sides. The commentary states that the problems of famine have now been alleviated.

II. NEWS FROM ENGLAND. An item that outlines the construction processes involved in the manufacture of collapsible bicycles and motorbikes (Welbikes) designed for use by British

airborne troops. A British soldier demonstrates the rapidity and ease of assembly of a collapsible bicycle. Views of the bicycle production line are shown with the commentary stressing that although the bicycle weighs only twenty pounds it is 'built like a gun'. Women assembly workers work at benches on bicycle gear and ball bearing races, others attach wheels to bicycle frames. Completed bicycles are stacked on the back of a waiting soft-skin. The scenes are repeated at a factory constructing Welbike motorcycles for airborne use. Women factory workers use belt-driven grinding machinery on the assembly line floor. A male factory worker wears goggles as he welds fuel tank halves with an oxyacetylene torch. The commentary gives structural and performance statistics of the Welbike over views of spokes being added to motorbike wheel rims. A male assembly worker attaches a Villiers 2-stroke engine to a Welbike frame. The motorcycles are stacked pending delivery to airborne units. Three male factory workers demonstrate Welbikes in use, driving around a warehouse floor in a circular pattern. Other news from Britain includes: the visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to an RAF Bomber Command airfield where they meet Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris. The King and Queen also visit an unidentified United States Army Air Force (USAAF) airfield of the Eighth Air Force where they are met by Major-General James H Doolittle (Commander Eighth Air Force) and Brigadier-General Williams. The King reviews a guard of honour drawn from USAAF military police armed with M1 Garand .30-in self-loading rifles. Following an inspection of the interior of a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bomber, the King and Queen climb gingerly down a ladder at the side entry hatch of the aircraft.

III. RUSSIA. Stock shots show Russian 152mm Gaubitsa-Pushka obr 1937g heavy field guns firing at high elevation over the Dnieper River. The commentary states that Russian forces in the Southern sector are now sweeping all before them in a massive offensive that is pushing the retreating German forces into 'Hitler's satellite countries' such as Rumania (Romania). Russian infantry carrying Pistolet-Pulemyot Shpagina obr 1941g 7.62mm sub-machine guns, attempt to pull a rowing boat to a riverbank under German artillery fire. Russian infantry row quickly across a watercourse under accurate German small-arms fire that churns the water around their boat. Russian rocket fire erupts from behind a stand of trees (Soviet RS-82 rockets?). Russian infantry advance across steppe and past burning houses as the commentary states that the Russian forces are now over the borders of Rumania and are driving towards the vital Ploesti oilfields. A column of German prisoners winds its way across the steppe.



<b>Production Credits</b>	Martin, Charles: film editor
<b>Production Cast</b>	Keating, Rex: commentary
<b>Film/Video Format</b>	P 1/35/N
<b>Number of Reels</b>	1
<b>Length</b>	909 ft
<b>Running Time</b>	10 mins
<b>Black &amp; White/Colour</b>	B&W
<b>Silent/Sound</b>	comopt
<b>Language of Soundtrack</b>	English
<b>Language of Main Titles</b>	English
<b>Language of Subtitles</b>	French & Arabic
<b>Context Date</b>	1944
<b>Index: People</b>	Wavell, Archibald P (Field Marshal Lord) Wavell (Lady) George VI, King Elizabeth, Queen (Queen Mother) Doolittle, James H Harris, Arthur T
<b>Index:</b>	GB.F & Bomber Command
<b>Units/Organisations</b>	US.A & Army Air Forces

**Index: Objects**

transport, British military - 2/3 wheel: bicycle  
 transport, British military - 2/3 wheel: motorcycle  
 delegations, British international - state  
 medical, British military - emergency  
 refugees, disaster, Indian - reception  
 combat, Russian  
 casualties, Russian wounded  
 prisoners of war, German - movement  
 weapons, Russian: Katyusha

**Index: Places**

Rumania  
 India & Calcutta

**Access Conditions**

IWM

**Context**

The newsreel series *War Pictorial News* was compiled by the Cairo Office of the Ministry of Information with an intended audience of Allied troops and local audiences in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Footage was largely assembled from items used by newsreel companies in Britain but was provided with a new commentary, with versions being issued in English, French and Arabic as deemed appropriate. Like most editions in the series, No. 153 was edited by Charles Martin and the commentary was provided by Rex Keating. Most editions featured three separate stories, divided into sections that are titled in both English and Arabic. Number 153 covers 'India', 'News From England' and 'Russia'. Only the Indian section is concerned with colonial matters, ie the famine in Bengal.

The official enquiry into the Bengal famine stated that it claimed 1.5 million lives. This is now considered to be a low estimate, with most authorities believing the casualty rate to be at least double this figure. There has been much debate over the root causes of the famine, in particular over whether or not actual food shortages were to blame (Sen 1981, Tauger 2002). What is not disputed, however, is the inept response of local government and the initial disregard of British officialdom. Some of the problems stemmed from a rise in the price of rice, which the Bengal government's actions only exacerbated (Bhatia, 1967, 321). Meanwhile, central government refused to see this as anything other than a local problem. In response to an appeal for help the Viceroy of

India, Lord Linlithgow, stated 'You make various suggestions in your letter as to what Government should do. Government in this case is, of course, the provincial government of Bengal and I have no doubt that you have put your suggestions to the Ministers, for it is to the provincial Government that it will fall to deal with them' (Bhatia, 1967, 339). This despite the fact that British rule was at least partially responsible for Bengal's problems: the war in Burma had cut off supplies of rice imports, and the presence of military personell in India had helped to foster inflation.

Amartya Sen has outlined three phases to the Bengal famine: Phase I, which lasted from the beginning of 1942 to March 1943, in which 'the economic distress that paved the way for the famine had already gripped a substantial part of the population'; Phase II, from March 1943 to November 1943, 'when starvation death reached its peak'; and Phase III, from November 1943 through most of 1944, when the death rate reached its peak 'but the most acute period of starvation had [...] passed' (Sen, 1981, 55). *War Pictorial News No. 153* was made in April 1944 during Phase III of the famine. It was only at this point that there was anything like an effective response to the crisis.

Lord Wavell, who succeeded Linlithgow as Viceroy in October 1943, inaugurated British Army assistance. Troops were stationed in Bengal and given the responsibilities of transporting foodgrains and organising relief. Wavell also urged greater assistance from the British Government, complaining to Winston Churchill that 'the vital problems of India area being treated by His Majesty's Government with neglect, even sometimes with hostility and contempt' (Sen, 1981, 79). This fact was not lost on Indian nationalists. Sen has noted that 'The famine became a focal point of nationalist criticism of British imperial policy in India [...], and official complacency came under particular attack' (Sen, 1981, 78).

### **Analysis**

'Happily all is now restored to normal but there was a time when only prompt and determined action by the British authorities saved Bengal from a major disaster'. This is the conclusion of the 'India' section of *War Pictorial News No. 153* and it is the story that the newsreel wishes to tell.

The 'determined' nature of the action is pictured in several ways. The army is described as being in battle against 'distance, time and hunger'. We witness the unloading and transportation of wheat supplies; the preparation of food for Bengali children; doctors attending children in an outlying village; and Lord Wavell monitoring an inoculation programme. The commentary lends weight to the British achievement. The supply ship that is pictured in the opening scenes is christened 'the

ark': 'For like the ark of long ago she carried the promise of new life'. Elsewhere we hear of the dramatic 'battle to reach starving men and women'.

It is the 'prompt' nature of the response that it is most cleverly portrayed. There is talk of 'immediate steps' and 'no time lost'. We are informed that soldiers 'at once' got down to preparing meals, that medical supplies were 'rushed' to the famine areas, and that field hospitals were 'quickly set up'. There is no factual detail regarding the duration of the crisis, its possible causes, or the number of victims. The only figure given is that the British have provided supplies for 'tens of thousands of *them*'. The way in which the film is edited helps to illustrate the pace of the British response. For example, the distribution of food and medicine is commonly illustrated in three short scenes: departure, journey, arrival. Lord Wavell also receives the benefits of sharp editing. The fact that he 'lost no time in coming to Calcutta' is underpinned by a quick cut from him disembarking his aeroplane to his visit to a village camp.

Throughout the film the credit for solving the crisis is accorded to the British authorities. Indian army personnel are shown helping to deliver supplies and administering food and medicine; however, the British are repeatedly shown as having the senior roles. They are pictured with clipboards and stethoscopes. Although the film regards the famine as being alleviated it does feature quite graphic footage of starving children. Even here the British are shown to be reassuringly in command. An officer checks a young boy's wellbeing by inspecting his eyesight. The boy's health is confirmed with a pat on the head.

**Richard Osborne (May 2009)**

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<b>Film Number</b>	WPN 161
<b>Film Title</b>	<b>WAR PICTORIAL NEWS NO 161</b>
<b>Web Address</b>	<a href="http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3469">http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3469</a>
<b>Production Date</b>	5/6/1944
<b>Production Country</b>	GB
<b>Production Sponsor</b>	Ministry of Information, Middle East
<b>Production Company</b>	War Pictorial News

### Synopsis

I. 'BURMA.' British Fourteenth Army M3 Stuart light tanks and soft-skinned vehicles drive along a jungle track during the fighting in defence of Imphal (Assam). British M3 Grant tanks drive along a jungle track. Aerial footage shows the harsh terrain in which the campaign is being fought with British/Indian soft-skinned vehicles negotiating twisting mountain roads. Grant tanks engage unseen Japanese positions using their 75mm cannon to fire high explosive rounds. Indian troops carry wounded on stretchers as Willys MB 4x4 Jeeps drive past towing ammunition limbers. Indian infantry armed with Lee-Enfield .303-in No.IV rifles and M1 Thompson .45-in sub-machine guns walk past Japanese dead. British M4 Sherman tanks (three-piece noses) drive past the camera laden with infantry. The commentary outlines the Allied use of light aircraft to evacuate casualties from difficult terrain over footage of a United States Army Air Force (USAAF) Stinson L-5 Sentinel liaison and observation aircraft. Huts burn in a jungle encampment. Universal carriers of the XV Indian Corps (5th Indian Division ?) drive along a jungle road past a sign giving directions for Buthidaung, Maungdaw and Bawli (Arakan). Footage shows the damaged exterior of the mosque at Maungdaw which had been used by elements of the Japanese 55 Division as a strong point. British troops (Royal Marines ?) laden with personal kit and Lee-Enfield No.IV rifles file along a wooden jetty to waiting boats at an unidentified Burmese location.

II. 'NEWS FROM ENGLAND.' The leaders of British Commonwealth countries meet in

London for the "Empire Conference" (first wartime Imperial conference) held in May 1944. Official cars stand parked outside 10 Downing Street in London. British Prime Minister Winston Spencer Churchill talks to Field Marshal Jan C Smuts (Prime Minister of South Africa) in the gardens of No.10 Downing Street. Winston Churchill, Field Marshal Smuts, W L MacKenzie King (Prime Minister of Canada), John J A Curtin (Prime Minister of Australia) and Peter Fraser (Prime Minister of New Zealand) are shown seated at a table at the start of the Imperial Conference. MacKenzie King talks to Peter Fraser and Clement R Attlee (British Deputy Prime Minister) in the gardens of No.10. British Admiral Andrew B Cunningham is shown in close-up. The commentary outlines the main points of a declaration signed by the five Empire leaders in which they reiterate their inflexible resolve to continue the war until the defeat of the enemy has been achieved and "the agony of mankind" has been ended.

III. 'ITALY.' A British military policeman directs Allied road traffic at a junction as heavily camouflaged M4 Sherman tanks drive past him. A British half-track (M9A1 International ?) mounting an air-cooled Browning .50-in heavy machine gun for anti-aircraft defence, tows an Ordnance QF 25-pounder gun along an Italian road, raising dust as it passes. The commentary states that the Allied assault on the Gustav Line and Rome has begun, as Indian Army Universal carriers drive past captured German infantry seated by the roadside. Universal carriers of the British 4th Infantry Division stand parked next to railway tracks as sappers repair damaged track sections. A British infantryman wearing crampons mends the terminals on a telegraph pole. British soldiers load freshly baked bread and "Libbys Canned Meals" into the back of waiting soft-skinned vehicles. A United States (US) Staff Sergeant loads supply parachute packs in a tented enclosure which are later taken to an airfield in a 3/4 ton 4x4 Dodge weapons carrier (with winch). The supply packs are loaded onto the wing hardpoints of a United States Army Air Force (USAAF) North American P-51A Mustang fighter aircraft (Allison V-1710-81 engine). The commentary points out that the air-dropping of ammunition and food supplies is frequently the only way of reaching isolated pockets of troops in mountainous regions. A USAAF Mustang P-51A takes off from a runway made of perforated steel planking (PSP) and is later shown dropping supplies to New Zealand infantrymen who crawl across rubble to retrieve the supply packages. The 75mm cannon of an M4 Sherman tank fires at unseen targets, with internal turret views showing loading and firing sequences. The commentary states that the Allied attack on the Gustav Line has been "battering its way forward, contested every inch of the way by bitter German resistance." New Zealand infantry fight in the rubble of ruined buildings using Lee-Enfield .303-in Mk III rifles and a Bren .303-in light machine gun. German prisoners of war stand in a barbed wire enclosure, guarded by a US military policeman armed with a .30-in bolt-action rifle (US

Springfield M1903 rifle ?). The commentary states that the Allied grip on the German 10th Army is ever tightening with the enemy being forced back on the last defence line before Rome itself.

<b>References</b>	English script
<b>Production Credits</b>	Martin, Charles: film editor
<b>Production Cast</b>	Keating, Rex: commentary
<b>Film/Video Format</b>	P 1/35/N
<b>Number of Reels</b>	1
<b>Length</b>	781 ft
<b>Running Time</b>	8 mins
<b>Black &amp; White/Colour</b>	B&W
<b>Silent/Sound</b>	comopt
<b>Language of Soundtrack</b>	English
<b>Language of Main Titles</b>	English
<b>Language of Subtitles</b>	French & Arabic
<b>Context Date</b>	8/5/1944 1/5/1944=16/5/1944 5/1944
<b>Index: People</b>	Churchill, Winston L S Smuts, Jan C

King, William L MacKenzie

Curtin, John J A

Fraser, Peter

Cunningham, Andrew B

Brooke, Alan F

Eden, Anthony

### **Index: Objects**

combat, Allied

casualties, Japanese dead - battlefield

medical, Allied military - movement: aeroplane

operations, Allied military - movement: road

combat, Allied

operations, Allied military - movement: road

supplies, Allied, movement [FA] - munitions

destruction, Italian military - area

prisoners of war, German - custody

### **Index: Events**

Second World War, South East Asian Front & Imphal, Attack on roads to & 8/5/1944

Second World War & Conference of Commonwealth Prime

Ministers & 1/5/1944=16/5/1944

### **Index: Places**

GB, England & London, SW <Downing Street>

Burma & Manipur Hills

Burma & Maungdaw

Burma & Buthidaung

Italy

### **Access Conditions**

IWM

### **Context**

The newsreel series *War Pictorial News* was compiled by the Cairo Office of the Ministry of Information with the intended audience of Allied troops and local audiences in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Footage was largely assembled from items used by newsreel companies in



England but was provided with a new commentary, with versions being issued in English, French and Arabic as deemed appropriate. Like most editions in the series, No. 161 was edited by Charles Martin and the commentary was provided by Rex Keating. Most numbers featured three separate stories, divided into sections titled in both English and Arabic. Produced in June 1944, No. 161 covers 'Burma', 'News From England' and 'Italy'. The first two sections cover matters relating to the colonies. The first section details the Japanese attack on Imphal and the beginnings of the Allied re-conquest of Burma; the second section depicts the Empire Conference, held in London in May 1944.

Ashley Jackson has described Burma as being a 'low-priority British colony until it became one of the Empire's major battlegrounds in the Second World War' (Jackson, 2006, 386). The capture of Burma in January 1942 represented the furthest extent of the Japanese incursion into Britain's South East Asia Empire and the principal territorial threat to the Indian sub-continent during the war. Burma was also the territory in which Japanese state-building achieved its greatest success; here they found sympathetic collaborators among the dominant Burman population. In August 1943, when the Japanese accorded Burma 'independence', the new leader Ba Maw declared that Burma was at war with the Allies.

Japanese troops advanced on India in March 1944, besieging Imphal and Kohima. Allied forces eventually proved triumphant in these battles, helping to launch a successful campaign to retake Burma. Here the Allied cause was helped by the fact that, having sampled the 'mixed blessings' of Japanese occupation and independent rule, many Burmese – including Aung San's Anti-Fascist Organization – now offered their support (Jackson, 2006, 402). Nevertheless, following their triumph in the Burmese campaign, the British failed to establish a presence in the country. When Burma left the Empire in 1948 the reorganisation of the country was determined by the Thakin movement, a political party that had challenged British rule in the 1930s and who had originally supported the Japanese during their occupation. Unlike many former colonies this new 'Union of Burma' did not choose to become a member of the Commonwealth.

The Empire Conference, meanwhile, was a platform for those countries that had already achieved 'Commonwealth' status. The benefits of being a member of the Commonwealth were outlined in the Balfour Declaration of 1926. Here Great Britain and the Dominions were defined as 'autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any respect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to

the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations' (['Imperial Conference', 1926](#)). The Empire Conference represented the first wartime gathering of the Prime Ministers of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Britain. Along with the Secretary of State for the Dominions, these representatives constituted the 'chief members' of the council (*The Times*, 1 May 1944, 4). The conference began as a 'council of war', and topics under discussion included 'armistice terms, reconstruction, and the endeavour to set up after the war a wider organization of security, based on power and common precaution against aggression' (*The Times*, 1 May 1944).

### Analysis

The first two sections of War Pictorial News 161 display different aspects of World War II and different attitudes towards colonial matters. There is a stark contrast between the battle footage of the Burmese section and the report on the Empire Conference.

Although the first section of the news report is concerned with a battle to safeguard one Empire territory and to re-conquer another, it is not couched in these terms. Throughout the emphasis is on the fight against the Japanese. Some of this bias is due to the nature of the film itself: it comprises genuine battle footage, including graphic images of Japanese corpses among the jungle terrain. There are no establishing shots outlining the geographical location of these military manoeuvres, nor is there an attempt to construct a larger narrative by filming local people. The Burmese are absent from the film. Their country is instead represented by a signpost, which gives the directions to Buthidaung and Maungdaw, and by the bombed exterior of a temple in the latter town. The supplementary commentary narrows the focus further still. Although the footage depicts British, Indian and American troops, they are always referred to collectively as 'the Allies'. No direct mention is made of India or Burma. Meanwhile, we hear repeatedly of 'the Japs', 'the Japanese' and the 'little men of Nippon'.

The Empire Conference section is different in several ways. Here the War is an abstract concept to be negotiated, and members of the Empire are here given a face and a name. As the camera pans across them we receive the roll call of 'Field Marshal Smuts, MacKenzie King of Canada, Winston Churchill, John Curtin of Australia, and Peter Fraser of New Zealand'. In contrast to the rough camerawork of the Burma campaign, here is a film that exploits photo opportunities. The Empire itself is reduced to these five leaders who are grouped together in Number 10 Downing Street; they pose for the cameras around a meeting table and then on a bench in the garden. Although present at

some of the sessions, the Maharaja of Kashmir and Sir Firoz-khan Noon, representatives of India at the War Cabinet, and Sir Godfrey Huggins, the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, are not depicted in the news report.

This section does share one feature with the earlier report: a focus on collectively attacking the enemy. This short news item concludes with a declaration made by the conference's core quintet: 'we affirm our inflexible and unwearing resolve, to continue in the general war with the utmost of our strength, until the defeat and downfall of our cruel and barbarous foes has been accomplished. We shall hold back nothing to reach the goal and bring to the speediest end, the agony of mankind'.

**Richard Osborne (May 2009)**

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[http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/cth11\\_doc\\_1926.pdf](http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/cth11_doc_1926.pdf).

Jackson, Ashley, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (Hambledon Continuum, 2006).

## Titles

**WEDDING OF MAHARAJ KUMAR SHRI MEGHRAJJI SHAEB OF KUTCH**

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/4780>

## Technical Data

## Year:

1933

## Running Time:

32 minutes

## Film Gauge (Format):

16mm Film

## Colour:

Black/White

## Footage:

1137 ft

## Production Credits

## Photography

STEER-WEBSTER, V.C.

**Synopsis**

Amateur footage of the wedding scenes, including, arrival of the Indian princes by yacht and train; the Dandia Ras, ritual sword dance; fuleka procession of Princes; state katchery; garden parties and fireworks and the ceremonies of the wedding.

**Colonial Film Synopsis**

“Wedding of the Maharaj Kumar Shri Meghrajji Saheb of Kutch and Maharaj Shri of Kishangarh 1933”. “Part I. The Bridegroom. Princes of India arriving. The Dandia Ras. A Fuleka Procession”. “Ghani Khama”. “Princes of India Arriving.’ Ruling Princes arriving at Kundla on His Highness the Maharao Saheb’s Yacht ‘Nagmati’”. Large yacht on open waters, about 50 people on board including uniformed crew. View of the Maharaj on the balcony, wearing double-breasted blazer. Princes disembark and walk down jetty, which is lined with guards, and go on through an archway. Five elegantly dressed Princes in an open-topped car. Four seated Princes. Train arriving at station, elderly Prince with ceremonial sword disembarks. Further scenes of disembarking, Maharaj dressed in finery. Prince enters horse-drawn carriage. Horse-backed troops. Foot soldiers lined for inspection. Return to horse-drawn carriage, four Princes now inside. Maharaj enters separate carriage, followed by others. Princes descending steps. Maharaj’s carriage passes in front of troops,

followed by soldiers on horseback. Maharao Shri Khengarji (?) inspecting foot soldiers who have rifles. Canons are fired in the darkness. “ ‘Dandia Ras.’ Played in the gaily decorated courtyard of the Palace by the Bridegroom during the Wedding celebrations”. Guests beside a palace archway, workers visible in background carrying bundles. Views of the palace, decorated with flags. Guests at the palace, including roof-top scenes of young royalty. Princes walking through a courtyard. Military band. Royal party watching the Dandia Ras. Princes dancing the Dandia Ras, locals behind a perimeter fence look on. Princes ascend steps. More people dance the Dandia Ras. “ ‘Fuleka Procession.’ The Bridegroom tours the ancient capital of the State on an elephant with the Ruling Princes of India in procession”. Fireworks watched by large crowd of locals. Maharao Shri Khengarji (?) among the crowds. Maharaj enters a glittering howdah on the back of an elephant. Elephant goes through archway illuminated with electric lights. Fuleka Procession in the darkness. Woman dancer. “End of Part I.”. “Wedding of the Maharaj Kumar Shri Meghraj Saheb of Kutch and Maharaj Shri of Kishangarh. 1933”. “PART ii. A State Katchery. The Barkhast Salute. Mamera Procession. Garden Party. The Pistina Procession. Fireworks”. “ ‘State Katchery.’ His Highness the Maharao Saheb and Members of the Ruling Family attend a State Katchery in honour of the Bridegroom”. Princes parading through building with archways. Royal party sat cross-legged on a platform, Princes file towards them. “ ‘Barkhast Salute.’ His Highness the Maharao Saheb takes the ‘Salute’ at the finish of the State Katchery”. Shot through archway of richly adorned elephant. Panned shot across troops and military band. Elephants circling in a courtyard. Troops march behind elephants in a procession. “ ‘Mamera Procession.’ Presents carried in procession to the Palace from His Highness the Maharaja of Sirohi, maternal uncle of the Bridegroom”. Locals among palace buildings; troops march through followed by people bearing gifts borne on trays. “ ‘Garden Party.’ Maharaj Kumar Shri Vijayarajji Saheb gives a garden party in honour of his son – ‘The Bridegroom’”. Indian and European guests walking in a garden. Indian military form guard of honour as guests arrive at garden party. Servants and empty tables; waiting for guests to arrive. Intermingled European and Indian guests at party, servant carries a large box camera. A hand-held movie camera visible on one of the tables. Maharaj and European man cut a cake with a large sword. “ ‘Pistana Procession.’ The Bridegroom leaves the capital in a State procession at the hour appointed by the Priests before starting out for Kishangarh”. Oxen pulling canon on a cart. Locals view procession consisting of military troops, decorated elephants, camels, horses, men on stilts, palanquins, dancers and musicians. “ ‘Fireworks.’ A firework display at Hamirsar Tank in honour of the Bridegroom”. Fireworks, including illuminated sign reading ‘God bless the Royal Family’. “End of Part II”. “Wedding of the Maharaj Kumar Shri Meghraj Saheb of Kutch and Maharaj Shri of Kishangarh. 1933”. “PART III. Barat Party leaves for Kishangarh. Sarhaddi Teeka Ceremony.

Reception of Bridegroom at Kishangarh. The Padla Ceremony. Procession of Bride from Barat Camp”. “Barat Party.’ Headed by His Highness the Maharao Saheb”. Princes board decorated steam train. Train in motion. Guests walk through garlanded arch, which bears the word ‘welcome’. Princes walk through guard of honour on a jetty. Footage from boat, looking at royal party on shore. Yacht bearing Kutch flag. Indian musicians playing traditional instruments. Passengers sat on the boat. Indians and Europeans playing cards below deck. Boats on the water. Motor boat approaches the cameraman’s boat. Boats at sunset. Military inspection, guard of honour and military parade. Illuminated tower and palace. “ ‘Sarhaddi Teeka.’ The Bridegroom is met on the boundary of Kishangarh by Sardars, Joshis and Purohits to perform the Sarhaddi Teeka Ceremony before he enters the State”. Princes beside a train. Ends.

### **Context**

Under British rule India consisted of two divisions: British India and the Princely or Native States. Princely states were nominally autonomous and were outside the government of India’s tax base. The Government of India advised these states and provided them with loans and finance; in return the Princes acknowledged the sovereignty of the British ruler – hence their own lower designation as ‘Princes’ - and were commonly bound to supply military forces for the Empire’s defence (Buyers, 2008).

There were over 500 Princely States in the sub-continent, occupying about a third of its landmass. They varied enormously in size, from principalities with populations under 100,000, to large States such as Kashmir and Hyderabad. The more prestigious Hindu Princes usually used the prefix ‘maha’ (great) in their titles, while the majority of Muslim Princes used the title ‘Nawab’. Ranking was signified by the gun salute system, with Princes being accorded between three and 21 salutes in line with their prestige. Kutch (or Kachchh) is the largest district in the State of Gujarat and its Maharao was entitled to a 17-gun salute.

The Princes led opulent lives. Ann Morrow recalls ‘Carpets of ivory, pearls of gold, coffers of diamonds and rubies, emeralds as big as goose eggs’ (Morrow, 1986, ix). Family events were marked with elaborate rituals, offering a mixture of ostentation and tradition. The geographical location of Kutch, surrounded by the sea on one side and the desert on the other, helped the state to preserve its distinct customs (Dilipsinhji, 2004, 11). Maharao Shri Khengarji, who ruled from 1876 to 1942, was a strong traditionalist. Dilipsinhji claims that he ‘preserved and persevered with the practices

and the institutions despite the technological advancement and political awakening' (Dilipsinhji, 2004, 13).

The Princes were not entirely immune to changing events in India. In the early 1930s they made their most visible intervention into politics, taking part in Lord Irwin's Round Table Conferences. Responding to strong nationalist demands, these events were held to discuss the future constitution of the sub-continent. The Princes, whose status would be threatened by an independent India, proposed the idea of a federation between their States and British India. Although this idea was ratified at the first conference, divisions among the Princes eventually led them to retreat from their own proposition. Maharao Shri Khenjarji, who attended the first Round Table meeting, was among the earliest to withdraw; one of his reasons being that he would not enter a federation if it meant 'exposing his dear subjects . . . to extra taxation' (Copland, 1997, 102).

When India achieved independence in 1947 the Princely States were encouraged to accede to either India or Pakistan. As compensation for the loss of their political autonomy, the Princes were granted their hereditary titles, given privileges of rank and honour, and awarded privy purses to cover their living expenses (Buyers). In 1948 Mahara Shri Khenjarji's grandson, Madan Sinhji, transferred the administration of Kutch to the Republic of India. Madan Sinhji had been 'meticulously groomed' to carry on the traditions of the state but proved to be somewhat profligate (Dilipsinhji, 2004, 11). Dilipsinhji accuses him of 'annihilating beyond retrieval the entire cultural heritage of his forefathers' (Dilipsinhji, 2004, 11). This film preserves part of that cultural heritage, captured in the footage of the wedding ceremonials performed for Madan Sinhji's brother, Mehraji Saheb. This footage was shot by the amateur filmmaker Steer-Webster V.C., who was responsible for other films shot in the state, such as *Visit of Mr and Mrs J Royle and Miss H Dowell to Kutch State* (1936), and *Expedition in Search of Flamingo Breeding Grounds in the Great Desert of Kutch* (1935).

### **Analysis**

In this film there is evidence of the ways in which the members of the royal family of Kutch were 'meticulously groomed' to carry on the state's traditions. Dilipsinhji argues that during the course of the twentieth century ritual celebrations were scaled down, with marriage ceremonies being performed in a day, rather than extended to over a month (Dilipsinhji, 2004, 14). Here, however, there is a ceremonial display that Mansur Quraishi describes as being 'so opulent that it is hard to imagine that it was real' (Quraishi). The formalities include the state reception of royal guests; a parade of servants bearing marriage gifts, which are borne on over 100 silver trays; and the 'Pistana'

procession, featuring decorated beasts, men on stilts, dancers, and a cast of thousands. The Princes, their palaces, and their beasts are all richly ornamented.

The film is shot from a single camera, usually positioned to capture long shots. Many of the scenes feature the bridegroom, but the camera is not primarily focused on him. Instead the interest seems to be in capturing the full scale and splendour of the spectacle. Although a great series of formalities can be witnessed, the film captures only a sample of the events that would have taken place. It also only details those rituals taking place in advance of the wedding itself, and concentrates on the bridegroom's largely male-dominated ceremonies. Parallel events would also have taken place for the bride (Dilipsinhji, 2004, 118)

The filmed formalities capture the mix of Indian traditions (such as the Dandia Ras, the ritual sword dance that would be performed each evening in the days leading up to the departure of the bridegroom); those implanted by the British (a gun salute); as well as those that were particular to the area (such as the Fuleka Procession, a night time parade led by the bridegroom riding an elephant). The film also captures the physical isolation of Kutch that had helped the district to incubate these ceremonial practices. It begins with a larger group of ruling princes arriving by yacht, and towards the end the bridegroom's party can be seen travelling across the sea towards the homeland of the bride.

The film discloses something of the relationship between the royal family and their subjects. The local people are excluded from many of the ceremonies; in others they perform subservient duties; and in others they are merely onlookers. They are spectators to the processions and to a firework display. The latter culminates with an illumination that spells out for them 'God bless the Royal Family'. There is also a large crowd of spectators for the Dandia Ras. At first this dance is preserved for members of the royal party, with locals being kept behind a perimeter fence. Later on they take over the dancing, and prove to have superior technique. The film also illustrates the relationship between the Princes and the British. The least opulent part of the wedding formalities is a tea party, in which many European guests are present. Here they can be seen intermingling freely with the Indian Princes.

Although an amateur film, it is well shot, with only the night time footage occasionally suffering from a lack of clarity. The film is effectively separated into scenes that are clearly signalled by title cards. Some elements of the formalities are out of sequence, however, according to the schedule that



is set out in Dilipsinhji's book. Ultimately, the film provides a valuable record of the Indian Princes, captured during the 'feudal twilight' that existed between the Round Table Conferences and the coming of independence (Brown, 1994, 288).

**Richard Osborne (October 2009)**

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**Film Number** IWM 876

**Film Title** **WITH THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN INDIA**

**Web Address** <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/3569>

**Production Date** 1919

**Production Country** GB

### Synopsis

Everyday life for members of 99 (Madras Presidency) Squadron RAF at Ambala, India, June-September 1919.

(Reel 1) The troopship *SS Barpeta* brings a fresh contingent for the squadron into Karachi harbour. The men travel by train on to Ambala, where they get their first real view of India, including a hookah smoker, and the 'local cab', a one-horse cart. Officers sit outside their bungalows and NCOs outside an open-air canteen in the cool of the evening. Out on the parade ground the airmen go through drill routines, bayonet fighting, and a boxing match. Indoors other airmen, with some help from Indians, work at their trades: some repair the engines of the squadron trucks and planes: others plane wood and drill metal, while others repair tyres. In a workshop the wings and tails of aircraft are being repaired. The squadron flies Bristol F2B Fighters. Some of the pilots pose for the camera. (Reel 2) 'Life is not always dull. A message may arrive asking for a turbulent tribal village to be bombed.' An officer receives the message and briefs the crews of two aircraft while their planes are bombed up. Throwing up a lot of dust the Bristol Fighters take off. Later a wireless operator at base receives a request for help from one of the planes. The second plane, on return, confirms that the first has made a forced landing in a field through engine trouble. A breakdown tender drives out to assist, and starts repairs. Meanwhile recreation continues, with football and tennis matches at the squadron. At the RAF Depot in Karachi airmen go boating and bathing in the harbour. At one of the hill stations officers depart to stalk 'buck', catching nothing but having time for a picnic. (Reel 3) Airmen shop in the bazaar at Ambala, and a civilian (the cameraman ?) joins in. 'Typical' Indians are shown. One of the camels used by the RAF for transport, 'a quaint creature', is ridden by his owner. In the surrounding countryside the cameraman films mosques and Hindu temples. At this point the

film breaks up into extra scenes from previous reels: the football match, the repair to the damaged aircraft, more of the football match. Then a game of billiards being played in the officers' mess. Finally the boxing match and the bayonet fighters again.

### Notes

Remarks: probably a 'home movie', this certainly has all the faults associated with that genre. Failing to allow for the intense light of India, the cameraman often produces faded images and only rarely uses close-ups. In contrast he has used dissolves, iris shots and masked shots far too often, and with no understanding of their conventional meanings. His staged scenes are frequently so obvious as to be comical. The film tells far more about the attitudes of the British in India than about the realities of life there.

### Comments

Acquisition method: originally noted as 'gift (?)' suggesting some query as to provenance.

**References**                      shotsheet

**Film/Video Format**        P 1/35/A

**Number of Reels**            3

**Length**                        2900 ft

**Running Time**              49 mins

**Black & White/Colour**    B&W

**Silent/Sound**                Silent

**Language of Soundtrack** None

**Language of Main Titles** English

**Language of Subtitles**    English

**Context Date**                6/1919=9/1919

**Index:** GB.F & Sqdn 99  
**Units/Organisations** GB.F & [Sqdn 27]

**Index: Objects**

- operations, British air - routine
- recreation, British air - tourism
- ships, British auxiliary - transport: Barpeta
- transport, Indian civilian - rail
- society, Indian - sustenance
- transport, Indian civilian - animal
- training, British air
- recreation, British air - sport: boxing
- operations, British air - maintenance
- aircraft, British - combat: Bristol F2B Fighter
- operations, British air - sortie
- operations, British air - return
- communications, British air - electronic: morse
- transport, British air - truck, special: breakdown tender
- recreation, British air - sport: football
- recreation, British air - sport: tennis
- recreation, British air - sport: boating
- recreation, British air - casual
- recreation, British air - sport: hunting
- society, Indian - ethnic
- buildings, Indian - religious: mosque
- buildings, Indian - religious: temple
- recreation, British air - sport: billiards
- animals, mammals: camel

**Index: Places**

- India & Ambala
- India & Karachi

**Index: Concepts**

- dust
- dry season

<b>Acquisition Method</b>	Gift
<b>Access Conditions</b>	IWM
<b>Rights</b>	IWM
<b>Date and Cataloguer</b>	7/1983 SDB 9/7/2003 JCK

### *Context*

*With the Royal Air Force in India* was filmed in 1919, the year in which the Ambala airbase, India's first, was opened. Its original occupants were the 99 RAF squadron (Das, 2004). This nascent outfit was not particularly well equipped. In his book, *The Central Blue*, Sir John Slessor, Marshal of the Royal Air Force, recalled that 'it was a common experience to have to borrow a propeller from one flight, a tail-skid from another and a wheel from the third to make a single aeroplanes [sic] in the squadron fit to take the air' (quoted in Das, 2004).

Ambala is located in the north of India close to the Afghan border. During the British rule of India, Afghanistan was regarded as a buffer state, sandwiched between north-west India and the Russian Empire. By means of a series of wars against the country Britain took control of Afghanistan's foreign policy and influenced the country's choice of leaders. Britain was also responsible for drawing up boundaries. In 1893 the British Indian Foreign Secretary Sir Mortimer Durand undertook a mission to define the border between Afghanistan and India. The Durand line arbitrarily cut through tribal areas, prompting disturbances. These intensified after 1901 when the Indian Viceroy, Lord Curzon, created the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), which again cut through the homelands of the Pashtun tribes (Saikal, Farhadi and Nourzhanov, 2006, 50).

In 1919 Afghanistan's new leader Amanullah Khan declared independence from Britain, sparking the third Anglo-Afghan War. Afghan troops allied with Pashtun tribesmen crossed the Durand Line in May 1919. In the ensuing combat British air power, limited as it was, proved decisive (Barthorp, 2002, 152). Although Khan agreed to an armistice in August 1919, skirmishes with the tribesmen continued. The main role of RAF in Ambala in late 1919 was to quash an uprising by the Wazir tribe (Haq, Khan and Nuri).

1919 was a pivotal year for India. The Government of India Act made concrete the Montagu Declaration of 1917, which had first proposed self-rule for the sub-continent. Although this act proposed no radical changes for central government, for the first time Indian ministers were given power at the provincial level. The Government also imposed the Rowlatt Act, which extended emergency wartime powers indefinitely. It was the nation-wide opposition that Gandhi organised in response to these measures that first gained him public prominence.

### *Analysis*

*With the Royal Air Force in India* sits halfway between a home movie and a professional film. It employs devices familiar from the cinema such as intertitles, dissolves, and irises. There is effective use of the intertitles (different borders are used to indicate distinct types of scene), but the framing devices do not accord with their conventional application in professional film. For example, without any explanation, a scene on a boating lake is shot entirely through an iris.

There is an attempt to construct a narrative within the film. The action commences with a troopship arriving and the film then shows the squadron's first experiences of India. Scenes of repairs taking place in the airbase's workshop prefigure the later mending of a damaged plane. Elsewhere, however, scenes are randomly assembled. This is most apparent in relation to the sporting activities of the RAF, which return to the screen when least expected.

The cameraman is limited in the subject matter to which he has access. The main action takes place in and around the compound, and the filmmakers appear a little weary of this fact. After the scenes in the workshop a title card announces 'Life is not always dull', adding that 'A message may arrive asking for a turbulent tribal village to be bombed'. In this sequence we do not see any of the tribesmen or any of the bombing; instead the film laboriously details the departure and return of the planes. Drama is instead provided by the fact that one of the planes 'malfunctions', and we then witness staged sequences of its call for help and of its repair.

The film provides no background information regarding the tribal campaign and says nothing of the political changes taking place in India. What it does disclose is some of the colonial attitudes of the British. These are in evidence in filmmakers' priorities and biases. They depict the methods and machinery of the RAF as up to date, and in contrast portray India as an antiquated society. The film's 'Indian Scenes' are solely focused on traditional life, capturing hookah smoking, haggling, folk

music and dance. The filmmakers are also generally more interested in Indian buildings than they are in the people of the sub-continent. There is only one scene in which the cameraman deliberately focuses on a group of locals. At an RAF football match Indian men among the crowd are filmed in medium close-up; it comes as a surprise when a panned movement of the camera reveals a smartly dressed British woman in their midst.

Colonial attitudes are also evidenced by the action that takes place within the film. Indians are regularly depicted performing subservient duties for RAF personnel. An extended example is provided in the scenes of a buck hunting expedition. As they head out on the hunt RAF officers get to occupy a horse and cart while their Indian servants have to walk behind. During the hunt one of the servants guides the officers towards the prey and carries their picnic. He is not allowed to share it with them, however. While the officers have their food and drink he has to sit apart.

In this film the hunts for tribesmen and for animals are portrayed in a similar manner; both come across as being good sport for the RAF. These events appear to be as much about the excursion as they are about the kill, not least because neither the tribesmen nor game can be witnessed. The hunts in fact appear to be more relaxing than the RAF's sporting activities. It is only in the boxing and football matches that sinews are strained and conflict is apparent.

**Richard Osborne (September 2009)**

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## THE FILM ADVISORY BOARD AND INFORMATION FILMS OF INDIA

Web Address: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/production-company/information-films-of-india>

B. D. Garga has described the Indian documentary film as being ‘a war baby, conceived by the British and nurtured by the Indians’ (Garga, 1987, 26). This dual parentage provided the Indian documentary with an unusual and often fraught gestation.

At the beginning of the Second World War the British government’s Ministry of Information (MoI) noted two main needs for Indian documentary film: to promote War propaganda within India itself, and to portray a positive image of British rule of India to audiences abroad (Garga, 2007, 62). The person initially in charge of reconciling these aims was Desmond Young, who had been employed by the Government of India as its chief press advisor at the outbreak of War. Despite being a film novice, Young was enthusiastic about his task. He believed that film was the ideal medium to extend Indian military recruitment ‘beyond the so-called “martial classes”’ (cited in Garga, 2007, 63). Young first turned to British advertising agencies operating in India to make his propaganda films, believing that ‘it was their business to know about selling through pictures’ (cited in Garga, 2007, 63). These agencies nevertheless turned to established Indian film studios to help with the documentaries.

In early 1940 Young showed his first batch of films to the MoI. Among them were *He’s in the Navy* (1940, Wadia Movietone), which showed the recruitment of naval cadets, and *Planes of Hindustan* (1940, Wadia Movietone), which detailed the activities of the Indian Air Force. These films were quickly made and were rudimentary in the extreme. Young conceded that ‘Since there has been no demand for documentary shorts in this country in the past, direction is somewhat amateurish’ (Young). The MoI found them ‘interesting’, but not of sufficient quality for distribution abroad (Garga, 2007, 64). In India, Young found that dubbing the films into the country’s major languages was ‘comparatively simple’, but getting them shown in cinemas that usually only showed Indian-language films provided a more difficult problem (Young).

It was this situation that led to the creation of the Film Advisory Board (FAB), which was formed on 4 July 1940. Between them, the FAB’s members controlled ‘all the principal circuits in India’ (Young). This situation led to complaints from the Indian press that the organisation operated as a mutually beneficial cartel (Garga, 2007, 69). It was the FAB’s remit to put before the Indian public ‘films of interesting war subjects and others of informatory value’ (Garga, 2007, 65). Several of the



FAB's members, including its first chairman, J.B.H. Wadia, were nationalists, but they were willing to make films that supported British war aims. Srirupa Roy believes that for some of them providing this support was a 'tactical manoeuvre', as they believed it would help 'the long term goal of national independence to be secured' (Roy, 2002, 239).

Despite the formation of the FAB, the MoI remained unconvinced that quality documentaries could be produced in India (Garga, 2007, 66). As a result the noted British documentary producer and director, Alexander Shaw, was despatched to the sub-continent to head a film production unit, set up under the aegis of the FAB. During his period in charge Shaw employed some talented Indian filmmakers, including Partap Parmar and Ezra Mir; he also succeeded in improving the quality of the films produced. Among the 13 short documentary films he was responsible for were *Defenders of India* (1941), covering the contribution of Indian soldiers to the Libyan campaign, and *The Handymen* (1941), which outlined the work of the Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners. Shaw had to reconcile a number of conflicting demands. While he had wished to introduce a more subtle form of propaganda to his films, others at the FAB demanded that the films be made simple in order to address the illiterate among the Indian audience (Garga, 2007, 71-72). Moreover, he also had to satisfy both an Indian audience and the audience abroad. During his period in charge the funding and the choice of subject matter of the FAB productions was split jointly between the Government of India and the MoI (Woods, 2001, 298). Philip Woods has noted that, caught between these two camps, 'The films have none of the verve and imagination of the best British official propaganda films of the Second World War, but neither do they have a distinctive indigenous quality' (Woods, 2001, 304). While several of Shaw's films were shown in Britain and distributed to other Empire countries, they were less readily accepted in America. R.R. Ford, the film officer for the British Library of Information of New York, noted that *Defenders of India* and *The Handymen* represented a 'great advance' on earlier films, but he still felt that they were only suitable for non-theatrical distribution (Ford). He also noted that 'The fundamental problem is the unfortunate fact that very little, if anything, that a British person says about Indian affairs is believed here' (cited in Garga, 2007, 78).

There was a further problem. As Garga states, 'Shaw was the right man for the job but had arrived at the wrong time' (Garga, 2007, 70-71). He arrived in India in the winter of 1940, a time of nationalist civil disobedience. Shaw later noted that the fact that his film unit was set up 'by the British to help create a favourable climate of opinion at a time when the Indian mind was entirely set on independence made it not only frivolous but also irrelevant' (cited in Garga, 2007, 68). He

resigned from his post on 21 October 1941, two months before the expiry of his contract. A telegram from the Department of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, to the Secretary of State for India reveals that the 'Reason was partly personal and partly connected with his work'. It goes on to explain that 'Neither Shaw nor his wife liked the country and the latter did not keep fit in Bombay. Shaw rightly felt that he was not getting all the co-operation he expected from members of Film Advisory Board that the Producer being an Englishman was resented and that his having been specially drafted from England to teach them production of documentaries aroused professional jealousy' (Govt of India, Dept of Information & Broadcasting). On his return to Britain, Shaw was outspoken in his criticism, stating that 'The unit had to function under the control of the FAB who were determined that it should fail because all the bitterest and the most interested parties sat on the Board' (*Cinetechician*, cited in Garga, 2007, 80). Wadia responded that this was a 'positively un-British . . . slanderous attack' (cited in Woods, 2001, 301).

Understandably, the Department of Information & Broadcasting thought it 'desirable to get an Indian Director in Shaw's place' (Govt of India, Dept of Information & Broadcasting). They selected V. Shantaram, a director working for the Prabhat Film Company, hoping his appointment would 'mollify Indian public opinion and secure hearty co-operation of Producers' (Govt of India, Dept of Information & Broadcasting). Santaram's period in charge coincided with a time of deeper nationalist unrest in India. India's leading political party, the Indian National Congress, rejected the mission of the British politician Sanford Cripps, who had promised Dominion status for India, and instead embarked upon the open rebellion of the 'Quit India' campaign. During this period most of the FAB's films were produced for non-theatrical distribution in India: the Government of India felt 'compelled owing to the political situation to give preference to producing films for local display' (Leach).

As the political situation within India intensified, and the threat a Japanese attack became more real, the Indian government chose to take increased control of film propaganda. Their first step was to disband the FAB, and put in its place a 'production and distribution manager appointed by Government' (letter from P.N. Thapar, Secretary to the Government of India, 5 January 1943, cited in Garga, 2007, 94). The members of the FAB board tendered their resignations on 18 January 1943, and two months later the government launched their replacement organisation, Information Films of India (IFI). The Indian government then introduced specific legislation for the industry. On 15 May 1943, they issued an order under Rule 44A of the Defence of India Act, making it mandatory for every exhibitor in India to include in each programme one or more films approved by the

government, this material providing a minimum running time of twenty minutes. This order became effective on 15 September 1943, coinciding with the launch of the government's own newsreel, Indian News Parade. The government justified this measure on the grounds that only about a third of Indian cinemas had been showing their official films; they believed that 'Films in a country like India with the majority of its population illiterate are one of the most potent medium of education and it was thought inadvisable not to tap this medium to its fullest possibilities ('Note for Cut Motion'). A further measure was taken on 17 July 1943, when the government introduced a licensing system, which placed an embargo on the production of any unauthorised film. With these measures in place, the number of official productions increased. The FAB had produced films at the rate of twenty-seven per year; by 1944 the IFI had doubled this output (Garga, 2007, 108).

Ezra Mir, stalwart of FAB productions, was chosen to head IFI. Rule 44A had been specific that official films should develop 'the right kind of war-mindedness' (Defence of India Rule: 44A. Control of Cinematograph Exhibitions). Mir responded by creating films such as *Hillmen Go To War* (1944), which details the enlistment of the men from Himachal Pradesh in north-west India. He nevertheless also wished to make films about India's history, trades, and cultures. Consequently IFI produced films such as *Musical Instruments of India* (1944), whose subject matter is outlined in its title, and *In Rural Maharashtra* (1944), which, although dealing with military recruitment, is largely concerned with farming practices. According to Garga, Mir 'realized that the future of Indian documentary could be made secure not on war propaganda, which was transitory, but with films that dealt with the socio-economic and cultural life of the people' (Garga, 2007, 108-09).

Correspondingly, more Indian personnel were brought into the organisation. Winifred Holmes, who worked for IFI, notes that by 1945 'all but three of the production and administrative staff were Indian' (Holmes, 1946, 43). The Indian government supported Mir's aims. In March 1944, the Hon. Sir Syed Sultan Ahmed stated that 'I believe this is the right line and this is why people are beginning to look forward to our films instead of groaning when the title is screened' (Ahmed). The Indian press had previously been hostile to the films of FAB and IFI, but towards the end of the War began to give them some qualified praise. The editor of the *Talkie Herald* wrote that 'Recent public appreciation of some of the short films produced by the Information Films of India has struck me as something rather unusual and creditable' (cited in Garga, 2007, 110). The films also received interest from abroad. *Tree of Wealth* (1944), about the variety of uses for the coconut tree, drew praise from Walt Disney and was nominated for an Academy award (Garga, 2007, 110). Nevertheless, the Indian audience was the main focus for these films: by 1944 a few of IFI's films were being distributed non-theatrically in Britain, but none were receiving a commercial release (Brock).

With the cessation of hostilities the IFI continued to make films. *Bassien an Indian Fishing Village* (1946), for example, details the trade of a Catholic Indian fishing community. However, in the run up to Indian independence the activities of the organisation were curtailed. In March 1946 the legislative assembly cut the IFI's grant, leading to the abolishment of IFI on 1 May 1946. In September 1946 the Defence of India Rule was withdrawn. The IFI had been viewed with suspicion by many Indian nationalists, and had been accused of 'try[ing] to dragoon an unwilling nation into the war' (Narwekar, 1992, 23). Between them the FAB and IFI produced 170 films, the majority of which were concerned with War propaganda, but among them there were innovative productions that addressed India's culture and crafts. Garga believes that, 'Looked at dispassionately, the IFI films covering almost every aspect of Indian life had made the audience aware of their own country, a vast subcontinent of 400 million people with different languages, religions, climates, customs, food and festivals. It was no mean achievement' (Garga, 2007, 115). The IFI was revived after Independence as the Films Division of the new Indian government, and it would earn a worldwide reputation for its work (Woods, 2001, 294). Here it is worth returning to the Defence of India Act, which in addition to being prescient, was aware of the mixed parentage of the Indian documentary film: 'D.I.R. 44A is a child of the war. But [at] the end of its life it will establish a new line of activity in the Indian film industry. Creating a market for shorts where it never existed before it will bring into being organisations for the production of educational shorts which will survive the war by the intrinsic merits of their productions' ('Note for Cut Motion').

**Richard Osborne (July 2010)**

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